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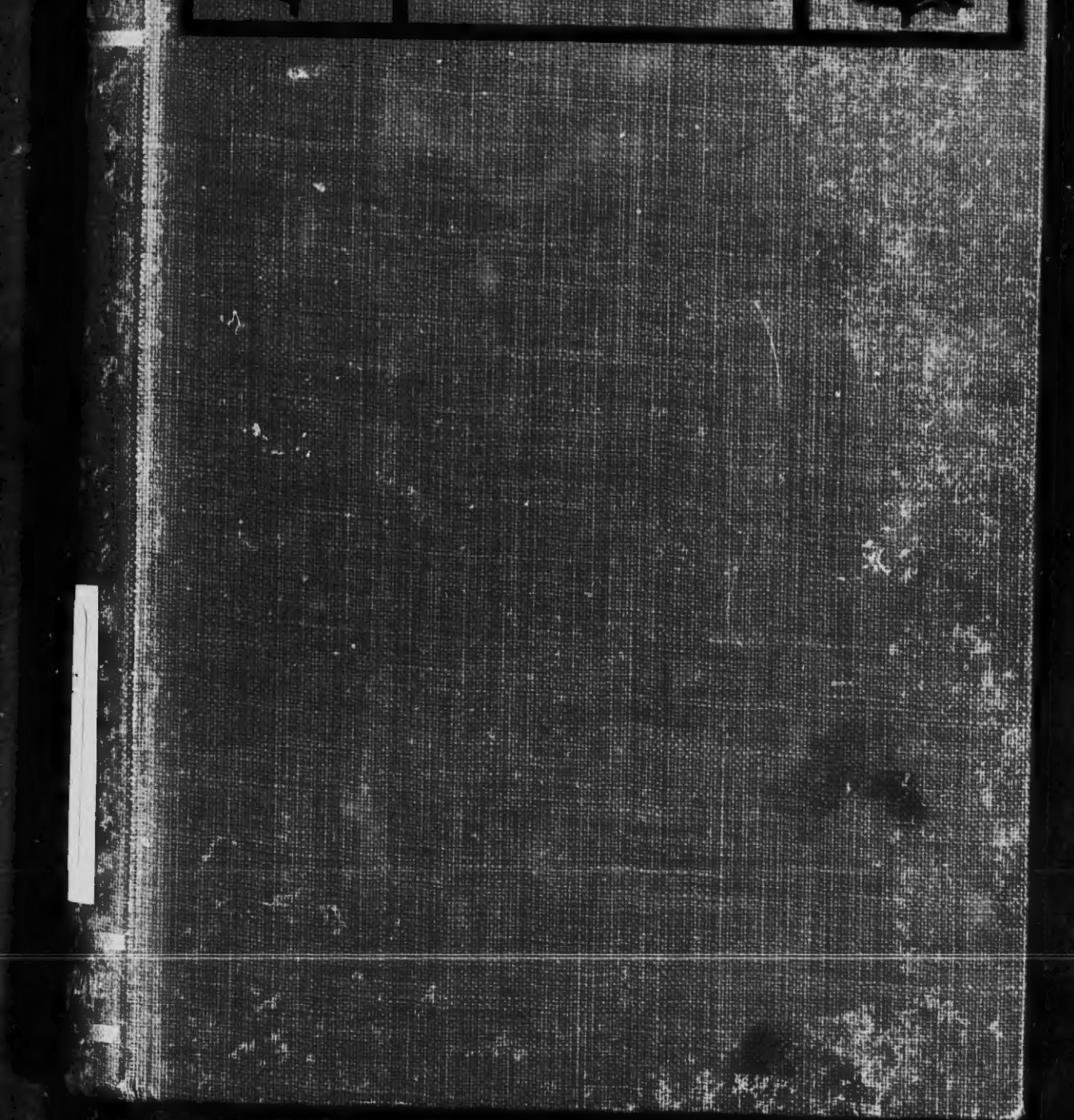
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It Never Can Happen Again





# It Never Can Happen Again

By  
William De Morgan

Author of  
"Joseph Vance," "Alice-for-Short," "Somehow Good"



In Two Volumes  
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## CHAPTER XXVIII

IN the absence of Master Bob at Rugby, and of his father with those Royd people in the country, Mrs. Challis had a quiet time in the Hermitage. She was able to keep house-keeping at bay by ordering in a joint for the family to prey on slowly for three days or thereabouts; after which Mrs. Steptoe had to help her to think of what to have in. Marianne sat still and bit a pen-stick, while Mrs. Steptoe remarked at intervals, "You see, as I say, ma'am, it isn't as if there was anything in the house."

When Aunt Stingy had done this two or three times, her mistress indicated the nature of the problem to be dealt with; saying, as a contented giraffe might have done, "I don't want another neck."

Mrs. Steptoe advanced a cautious suggestion: "You don't take to liver, ma'am?" Mrs. Challis did *not*; that was flat! But a piece for the kitchen was a different thing. Just as you liked! Mrs. Steptoe said in a soothing manner, "A nice little bit of liver!" and that was settled.

Should anyone not accustomed to these islands ask why the question of one day's rations should be approached as though it had been raised for the first time in the history of mankind, no answer can be given in the present state of human knowledge. All that can be said is that an equivalent interview is going on in most households of the natives every other morning, or thereabouts.

In time stimulated perspicuity saw a light. Shrewd discriminative subtlety was on Aunt Stingy's face as she said, "Why not the fowl to-day, ma'am, and stand the joint over for a day or two? Because in this briling weather it is that liable to smell faint!" Marianne cogitated deeply, turning the pencil in her mouth; then said, "If we were to have Mrs. Eldridge to-day instead of to-morrow. . . . It doesn't matter which, because Mr. Eldridge

won't be back till Wednesday." This will not bear close analysis; but Marianne was not pricking pins at a tissue, and all purposes were answered. When the children went out for their walk, they brought back word that Mrs. Eldridge would "come instead of to-morrow." And that is how on this particular Monday evening these two ladies are agreeing that this coffee is too strong, and there's no hot water, and the more florid one of the two is saying that she must speak to Steptoe about it.

The heat of the weather tells differently on them, which has to do with our epithet for Marianne's complexion. Charlotte's look is rather sallow than usual, as she leans back fanning the full lids of her half-closed eyes. She is not bad-looking, certainly—probably has been very graceful when she was a girl.

The coffee-incident must have interrupted a conversation, for the sound of resumption is in Charlotte's remark as she sips it. "I should write" is what she says.

"Which to? Him or her?"

"Her. No!—him. I should write to him."

"Which do you mean?"

"Him."

"I don't know what to say."

"What you've been saying to me just now."

"Nonsense, Charlotte! How can you talk such stuff?"

"Well!—I *should*." After which neither lady spoke for awhile, but seemed to be thinking over points raised. Marianne uneasily, and even with an occasional impatient jerk, resented as selfish by a cat asleep on her knees; Charlotte introspectively, but as one enjoying some internal satisfaction.

Presently Marianne spoke, looking curiously at her friend, as though she suspected this concealed something. "I wish you would say plainly what you mean, Charlotte," she said.

Charlotte answered evasively. "It doesn't the least follow that what I should do you ought to do." She had on Marianne the sort of effect the ringed snake is said to have on the oriole—was sure her victim would jump down her throat if she bided her time. And if Marianne did this of her own accord, she herself would clearly be free from all

complicities. For there was nothing Charlotte was so clear about in theory as that she did not wish to mix herself up in the affair; or any affair, for that matter. It was curious how frequently she found herself abstaining from getting mixed up. In this case, even when Marianne said point-blank, "But what *would* you do?" she still replied, "Never mind, dear! What can it matter what I should or shouldn't do?"

"Charlotte, you're unkind! At least, you're not friendly. You go in and out. First it's one thing, and then it's another. Suppose you were me, what would you do? Write to this girl, and just refuse the invitation?"

After all, Charlotte was not so very clear about what she would write. "N—no, dear!" she said. "I don't think I should write to *her*. I should send her a message, through him. All civility, don't you know? Couldn't leave home at present. Hope some other time. So nice of her to ask you! Best thanks. Kindest regards. That sort of thing. But writing to *my* husband, you know—the rule mightn't hold good for yours; I quite see that—I shouldn't mince matters."

"What *does* not mincing matters' mean? I think you might speak plain, Charlotte. Can't you *say* what you mean?" She puts her hand up to her head restlessly, causing her friend to ask, "Headache?" To which she replies impatiently, "Not headache!" and takes it down. Charlotte then resumes, with much implication that the use of her husband as a lay-figure franks her of responsibility.

"I should tell *him* plainly that if he wanted to make love to fashionable young women he might go his own way, and I could do without him perfectly well. I should let him know he's not the treasure he fancies he is."

Marianne looked unconvinced, incredulous. "Suppose he took you at your word, Charlotte!" said she.

Charlotte laughed out scornfully. "My dear woman," she said, "John's a born fool, I know. But he's not such a fool as that! He knows what he's like well enough to know that this sort of young woman is not the sort to give me a case."

"Give you a case?"

"Stupid girl!—don't you see? A case for divorce.

It's plain enough to anyone who isn't a downright fool. A telegraph-girl would be quite another pair of shoes."

"I suppose I don't understand these things."

"Now, my dear Marianne, do you mean to say that if you heard that your Titus had been lunching at Jules's with Lady Thingammy What's-her-name, it wouldn't be quite different from a telegraph-girl and an ABC?" Marianne said she couldn't see any difference. But this was only her obstinacy. Charlotte continued: "Well, I should! And so would the jury. Why, I know by this—that if it was Jules's I shouldn't lose a wink of sleep about it; but if it was a telegraph-girl, I wouldn't go to Clacton-on-Sea in August and leave John alone in London. Not with my ideas, which are rather strict. Of course, one isn't a Frenchwoman or an Italian."

"What are *their* ideas? How should I know anything about them?"

"Do you want me to tell you anything about them, or not? That's the question. . . . Well, of course, one knows what a Frenchwoman's ideas are, and I suppose Italians are exactly the same." Strange to say, this shadowy suggestion in a dropped voice, to fend off the dangers of empty space, seems to convey a distinct impression to its hearer, for she says, "Suppose they are, what then?" and the reply is, "Well—I suppose you wouldn't want us to do as they do! Would you?"

Mrs. John Eldridge possessed in the very highest degree the faculty of making it understood, by slight inflections and modulations of voice, by pauses in the right place, by gestures the shrewdest eyesight could not swear to, though the dullest could never remain in ignorance of them, that a lady and gentleman were engaging her attention. She had manipulated the subject in hand by a dexterous introduction of the Latin races, who are notoriously immoral, until a halo of profligacy had encircled her friend's husband and his aristocratic acquaintance. Marianne kicked in her soul against all suggestions of the kind, but with a misgiving that her friend knew more about "this sort of thing" than she herself did. This, too, she strove to keep under; not to allow Titus, whom she believed incapable of the part Charlotte's management would

have assigned to him, to be attired for it in the cast-off garments of some reprobate of the Parisian stage.

"I can't see what the ways of French people have to do with the matter. When I said what I did just now I wasn't thinking of that sort of thing."

"Then, dear, perhaps you'll tell me what you *were* thinking of. Because I can't make out, for the life of me." This came rather coldly from Charlotte.

"It's very simple. I meant that if Titus is tired of me, I had just as soon that he should go away to someone else. And so I would—just as soon. S-s-sooner!" If Marianne had stopped on the penultimate word, there might have been no breakdown. But it came, with the intensification of her courageous little falsehood; came in the stereotyped course one knows so well—first, the failure of the lips to be still, then the quickened breath, and then the final irrepressible tears. Then the beseeching to be left alone—only just for one minute! . . . all will be right in a minute, only don't speak to me, please! Go on talking!

"There!—I've been a fool, and I'm sorry." As she said this, Mrs. Challis returned to her pocket a handkerchief that had dried her tears, certainly, but had finished by taking a very unpoetical part in the transaction. The cat, bored by her demonstrativeness, had left her lap for a short stretch on the rug, and now returned with returning quiet.

Mrs. Eldridge took a base advantage. "No, dear!—you're very, very brave about it. I know just what I should feel myself. Any woman would feel exactly as you do. . . . Oh no, dear!—of course we both thoroughly understand. There's nothing really wrong, and nobody is to be suspected of anything."

"You don't see what—I—mean!" said Marianne. "You never have, Charlotte. But it ought to be simple enough. You don't suppose I think Titus isn't to be trusted away from my apron-strings after all the years I've known him."

"I don't know, dear. Don't ask me! Men are men. However, if you *can* trust him, I don't see what you want."

"I can want a great deal, and I do. I want him not to care about other people more than his own home."

"You want him not to care so much about this girl? Isn't that it?"

"In a certain sense, yes!"

"Very well, dear. Perhaps if there are more senses than one in the business, you'll tell me what they are. According to me, a man either cares for a girl, or he doesn't. I can't see any half-way."

"I can see heaps of half-ways. What I mean is, when he takes more pleasure in her society than he does in . . ."

"In his wife's? I don't see that we don't mean the same thing, so far."

"Then I don't mean that at all, but something else. What is the use of talking if you always twist what I say round?" Marianne is like a witness in the hands of a clever counsel, but with an advantage. If the witness resorts to the use of a bludgeon against the legal rapier, the Court interposes to protect his assailant. There was no Court in Marianne's case.

Charlotte retreated into the entrenchments of forbearance. "I don't want to quarrel, dear!" she said. "Suppose you write the letter!"

"To her?"

"To him. Do it now! You may just as well." None the less, Charlotte was surprised—only she didn't show it—when Marianne shook off the re-established cat, and rose to go to the writing-table. The cat, this time disgusted beyond words, stretched herself, and weighed the comforts of divers corners available. Mrs. Eldridge could have afforded one, but decided that cats were too hot in this weather. So Pussy had to be content with an angle in sofa-cushions.

The long-expiring light of the summer evening had been good to talk by, but enough of it was not left for letter-writing. Nevertheless, Mrs. Challis wouldn't ring for the lamp. Candles would do, she said. And having lighted them, she sat down to write.

A fly had perished in the ink since it was last used, and had to be coaxed out gradually, legs having got left behind by the first drags employed. Also, the pens—so described—consisted of a single example, which was a very long pen with diabolical corrugations at its shoulder, and a terrible sharp point. It refused to write on any terms, and on examination was proved to consist of one widowed nib, a



source of despair to the scribe. There were no other pens ; at least, Harmood had put them somewhere. Never mind !—there was a fountain-pen that did perfectly if you dipped it in the ink. It was really a lot better that way, because then you didn't inky your fingers all over. The experience of many among us is that *escritoirs* are strewn with writing materials of these sorts, especially the last.

However, there was no doubt of the fountain-pen, once its haughty spirit could be curbed and induced to submit to the position of a mere agent. And the sounds of writing come presently from the writing-table, mixed with the curses of its occupant, who presently discovers that she has been writing on a sheet with a 'limerick' on the back.

"Never mind. Let's see how far you've written." Mrs. Eldridge stretches her fingers out to receive the letter without taking her eyes off a paragraph she is reading in a *Daily Mail*. She holds the letter till she has finished, then reads it, and gives an immediate verdict. "You can't send *that*," she says.

"And why not ?" asks Marianne, a little nettled at this rather cavalier treatment of her effort. But she knows she has not the courage to rebel, not having a particle of faith in her powers of composition.

"You can't say, 'Your Miss Arkroyd has written to me, and I won't come, and you know perfectly well why.'"

"Why not ?"

"My dear ! . . . However, do if you like."

"Well, then—I *shall*." This was mere bluster, of which Charlotte took no notice.

"And you can't say : 'You know I am not wanted, and both of you will be wishing me somewhere else all the while.' Simply impossible !"

"I cannot see the impossibility. Titus would be in a panic about what I should say next. I hate their rooms—full of people. They always make me nervous."

Charlotte sees that interpretation down to her companion's level is necessary. "Rooms-full have nothing to do with it," she says. "He will think you meant you would be *de trop*."

"Well, and what does that mean ?"

Charlotte coughed explanatorily. "It is only used

## IT NEVER CAN HAPPEN AGAIN

under circumstances of three," she says, not without obscurity. And then adds, as a full light on the subject: "One has to go."

"Same as 'two's company and three's none,' I suppose! But why French?"

"It means more. There are niceties." And this lady seems to keep back a suggestion that these niceties are beyond her friend's range of French. She goes on with a roused attention, having glanced farther on as she spoke last, absently. "And, my dear, look here! You can't possibly send this: 'Why can't we agree each to go our own way! Lots of people don't go about everywhere in couples.' You can't send that!"

"Well, Charlotte, I *shall* send that, and I think you're ridiculous. Why shouldn't I send it when I mean it? If Titus would only not worry about, and think it his duty to say things, these people wouldn't want me. Why should they? And then perhaps we should have an end of complaining about Steptoe's gravy. I'm simply sick of it all." And Mrs. Challis taps with her foot, and shows a feverish irritability.

Charlotte keeps well on her higher level. "My dear Marianne, you are the most unworldly baby! Don't you see the interpretation that might be put—I don't say your Titus *would* put it, but he *might*—on 'Why can't we agree, et cetera?' If I were to say such a thing to John, it would be a telegraph-girl directly."

Marianne flushes angrily. "Charlotte! How often have I said to you that I hate you when you draw comparisons between Titus and your John! It might be fifty telegraph-girls with him, but I know Titus well enough to know..."

"Oh!" A slight interjection, but it checks Marianne half-way.

"At any rate, he has never deceived me about anything of this sort." The flush is vanishing.

"Not *exactly* of *this* sort—no!" Now, Charlotte had been watching her opportunity to say this, having noted that the effect produced by Mrs. Steptoe's story had been falling into abeyance, owing to the subsidence of a policy of pin-pricks between Mr. and Mrs. Challis, in view of his

pending visit to Royd, and still more in consequence of a sufficiently affectionate farewell at his departure. Marianne had in fact been gradually minimising the incident, and was on her way towards asking Titus straightforwardly for an explanation, as, of course, she ought to have done at first.

It is quite possible Mrs. Eldridge might have kept this card up her sleeve if Marianne had not nettled her by the way she spoke of her John. She may have provoked it; but did that matter? She was not going to let anyone else pelt him. Anyhow, she played the card, and, glancing up at Marianne, had reason to be satisfied with the effect it had produced.

Marianne may have known she looked white, and wished for darkness to hide it, for she blew both candles out, and returned to her seat with her back to the window. The cat sighed, as lamenting the selfishness of mortals, and resumed her old place, now again available, with a pretence of magnanimity.

"I shall copy that letter on a clean sheet, and send it." The darkness seemed to give the speaker fortitude.

"Go your own way, dear! I've done my best." Mrs. Eldridge claimed freedom from responsibility.

"You know, I suppose, that I spoke to mamma about that Steptoe nonsense—the photograph?"

"No, I didn't. What did she say?"

"Said it was all sheer impossibility. Said Steptoe had been turning the cupboards over when we were away at Easter, and cooked it all up."

"That won't do us any good. How did Steptoe know the name of the coal-merchant?"

"Saw it on the back of the photo, mamma says."

"And how did she know the name Verrall?"

"Because it's Bob's second name. Besides, it's on a brass plate on Kate's old portmanteau in the trunk-room."

"I can't say I think that accounts for anything." Mrs. Eldridge pointed out two or three weak points in Mrs. Craik's explanation, and condemned it as worthless. She was wrong. The explanation was a good one *per se*, but, like so many explanations, taxed human powers of belief more than the thing it explained. However, no one who has

the faculty of selecting his creeds ever sticks about the trouble one will give him. He only thinks of the advantages it will bring with it.

"Perhaps it doesn't explain. That's what mamma said, anyhow." Thus Marianne, as if it didn't matter much, either way. Then, more convincingly: "I don't believe Steptoe is lying, because I can't see what she has to gain by it. Besides, I pulled the photo out of the *passé-partout*, and it was gummed in, and the name on the back."

"Did you say so to your mother?"

"Yes, and she said I must have been mistaken, because, if not, the story would have been true."

"I can't see"—Mrs. Eldridge is talking reflectively, introspectively—"I cannot see *why* your husband did not tell you all about it! Suppose your sister *was* married to this man first, I don't see that it was any such hanging matter. Unless..."

"Unless what?"

"Well!—nothing, dear. That is, perhaps I oughtn't to say..."

"Charlotte!—that's you all over! You know you're wanting to say all the time. *Do spect out and have done with it!*" Marianne got up uneasily, and walked from place to place in the room. The cat went back to the sofa cushion, and resumed her task of getting a little sleep.

Charlotte means to say, in time. Trust her! "You know, dear Marianne, that all this is the *merest* speculation. We really know *nothing*! And ten to one, when you do speak of it to Titus, he'll be able to clear it all up. Besides, after all, it could only be the sort of thing that's always happening, and one says nothing about it as long as the parties get married afterwards..."

Marianne interrupts stormily. "Will you have the goodness, Charlotte, to tell me what you mean, and not beat about the bush! You can't mean that poor Kate..."

"I can't tell you anything, dear, if you get so excited. (Your hair's coming undone. A pin?—here's one.) Remember, I'm only mentioning this as *one* of the possibilities, and I don't suppose it's true. But if it were ever so true, I don't see that it would be anything to fly out about. After

all these years! . . . Will I tell you what I mean! Yes, dear, if you'll be quiet and listen."

"Will you go on?"

Mrs. Eldridge braces herself up to consecutive narrative, as in response to unreasonable impatience. "There was a marriage. That's understood—I mean your sister's with her first husband. And it was kept dark. . . ."

"I wish you wouldn't talk as if it was the Criminal Classes. Go on!"

"I can't if you interrupt. Well!—Mr. Challis was quite a young man then, and a friend of the first husband's, and she was young. You see!"

"I see their youngness would make it all the worse, instead of better. If it was true! But it isn't." At this point Marianne gives up the attempt to engineer the hair-pin. "Can't you stop stopping, Charlotte, and go on?"

Charlotte deserts the extreme of deliberation for irritating rapidity and conciseness. "The first husband may have been anything, for anything we know of him. Only, there must have been a reason for their parting, if you think of it. Within a few months! Now suppose—don't be in a rage, Marianne dear, it doesn't do any good!—suppose your husband was the reason! Of course, he would never tell you, if Kate never did. . . ."

"I was a child!"

"I don't think anything of that. Children are easier to tell than half-grown-up people. Remember, too, as time went on, how much harder it would get to tell. Fancy his beginning to speak of it! How would he? Come, Marianne!" And Marianne's silence admitted that she felt the difficulty her husband would have had in publishing for private circulation an early transgression of his own—and Bob's mother, please! It may all have been, and yet Titus may have done rightly to let bygones be bygones. That was her thought at the moment, but it jumped gladly at leave to go when further speech of Charlotte's brought a respite: "Of course, the obstacle to accounting for it this way is the divorce. It seems impossible there should have been a divorce, and your mother never heard of it!"

"Why, of course, Charlotte! What nonsense it all

is!" Marianne is greatly relieved. But we must not halloo before we are out of the wood. Charlotte had a reservation:

"Only there's just one thing—I'm afraid I must shock you, Marianne; only, mind you, I don't believe for a moment that it's true—just one thing, and that is . . . yes!—I'm going on . . . that is, that there may have been *no need for a divorce*. You see?"

She doesn't, evidently. For, after a moment's consideration, she says: "If there was no need for a divorce, why drag Titus in? What nonsense, Charlotte!" She is breathing freely over it—too freely.

"No, dear—not that way! You don't understand." A pause to get a clear start. "Your sister Kate and this man were *supposed* to be lawfully married. At least, the coal-merchant and his wife must have thought so. But suppose they were *not*! Don't you see, dear"—this very gently, not to tax her hearer overmuch—"don't you see that *then* no divorce would have been necessary?"

"You puzzle me so, Charlotte! Do stop and let me think. Say it again." She opened to the full a window partly raised for the heat, and found the sweet air from the Common grateful. For her head had become hot, and her lips were dry.

Charlotte followed her last instruction, by choice. "Try to imagine, dear, for instance, that your sister had been entrapped into a false marriage by this man, and that he discarded her because he was jealous of your husband. You know if he had grounds for his jealousy your husband might be bound in honour to keep silence—especially to her own sister. And then consider!—they *were* married afterwards."

It was beginning to dawn on Mrs. Challis that in the little drama her friend's imagination had constructed her husband figured as a licentious youth, a traitor to his friend; and a dissimulator, when he was posing at her mother's house as an honourable suitor to her sister, his only redeeming feature being his constancy to the girl of whose second betrayal he was the guilty author. While, as for that young woman herself! . . . Marianne's whole soul recoiled from the semblance of an indiscriminate



*liaison*-monger with which Charlotte had not scrupled to clothe her. The intrinsic impossibility of associating such an image with her sister made her feel as though she really disposed of the whole question when she said, with perfect *naïveté*, "But this was Kate!"

How perfectly clear and exhaustive! That was Kate—or would have been had there been any truth in the tale—and Kate was her grown-up sister in the early days when her father was living, and they were a household. That was our Kate that was just thinking about being a young lady when she herself, Marianne, was just beginning to take intelligent notes of her surroundings—our Kate that knew how to play the piano and had a governess—our Kate that became one herself in a modest way when father died, and it turned out that Uncle Barker had invested her mother's settlement-money in himself, contrary to the behests of the Lord Chancellor. How in Heaven's name could a thing one knew as a girl, unlengthened, become an immoral, unprincipled woman, like in books and newspaper-paragraphs? Absurd!

And yet—may not this be a question as hard for us to answer as poor, slow, middle-class, muddle-headed Marianne? Look at it from the other side! How many reprobates, dashing and otherwise, may there not be who began good and sweet, and kept so till they became bad and putrid—can even look back, from the gutter their last stage of decay is on the watch to defile, on a spell of blameless maturity? That ill-complexioned thing that thought it was singing as it reeled from the pothouse door but now, was once—maybe—a savoury little maid enough, with a sweetheart. What if he saw her at this moment?—saw the passers-by shrink from her and leave her a clear pavement?—heard the mock approval of London humour, seasoned to the shameful sight, and unashamed, "Go it, old Sairah"?

The story disclaims imputing all these thoughts to Marianne, or any of them. But the sum and gist of them came out—just as clearly, maybe more so—in those four words, "But this was Kate."

She turned from the window and looked her friend full in the face, in return for "What if it was?"—which was the

answer she got. She felt angry with Charlotte, who, for all her profession of belief that her surmises were probably baseless, seemed to be always supporting the one that ascribed most lawlessness to her husband and sister.

"What if it was?" said she. "Everything if it was." She couldn't argue to save her life. But she dealt with dialectical difficulties in a method of her own that was quite as effectual. This time it told forcibly.

"Don't blaze out at me like that, Marianne," said the enemy. "I can't help it. I suppose everyone was somebody's Kate once—even Jezebel and Judas Iscariot!" The selection sounded trenchant, and no Biblical critic was at hand. "Besides, as I said, it wasn't a hanging matter, at the worst."

"I thought you said you were strict, Charlotte."

"So I am. But this sort of thing *does* take place, and one knows it, and I don't see the use of going on nagging for ever." Marianne's religious feelings prompted her towards pointing out that the Almighty might not subscribe to this view; but she was not quick enough. Charlotte continued: "And how a girl who knows nothing can know if a ceremony's done correctly is more than I can tell. Look at vaccination—all the little ivories exactly alike! Why, you may be vaccinated from a mad bull and never be a penny the wiser!"

Any metaphor or analogy makes Marianne's head go round, and she still keeps silence. Charlotte ends with consolation: "And when you come to think of it, if they weren't correctly married, it was all to the good."

"What on earth you mean, Charlotte, I cannot imagine!"

"Well, dear!—I should have thought anyone would spot that at once. Even John saw that! Of course, if the first marriage was irregular, there *was* no breach of the Seventh Commandment." Marianne felt a distinct relief from one of the nightmare apprehensions about her husband's past that Charlotte's ingenious speculations had aroused. She and her friend shared with a large section of the respectable World, strict and otherwise, the idea that trespassers who jump over a wedding-ring fence should be prosecuted, while poachers on unenclosed property may escape with a caution.

But her mind was not capable of more than one idea at a time, and in dwelling on this remission of the imputations against him, she quite forgot that the theory of a victimisation of Kate by her first husband, if it did not acquit him of any indiscretion towards her sister, at any rate altered all the circumstances under which the indictment was framed. If there was no divorce, why select a correspondent? Marianne just missed the important point. Out of the chaos of cross-questionings of the mystery she emerged with one false fixed idea, that her husband's reason for concealing the story *must have been* his desire to draw a veil over that Brighton period before his pretended courtship and marriage. Mrs. Eldridge encouraged this idea.

"I hope you see now, dear, what I mean about the letter," said she, after some more talk, embodying the foregoing, more or less. She pulled the letter from under the cat, who had lain down on it, and read again: "'You know I am not wanted, and both of you will be wishing me somewhere else all the while.' I'm sure I'm right in saying you can't send that. If it was all innocence and Paul and Virginia and Jenny and Jessamy and Arcadian shepherds, I dare say! But, with that story not cleared up! My dear Marianne, *do* be a little a woman of the World. . . . Isn't that my cab?"

Marianne said drearily: "I think so. They'll tell us." Because, although Mrs. Eldridge made things worse for her every time she spoke, she clung to her as the only person in her confidence—for she restrained her communications to her mother—and as one for whose knowledge of the mysterious thing called "the World" she had always had a superstitious reverence. So, when Harmood announced the advent of the cab—in cypher, as it were; for she merely said, "Adcock for Mrs. Eldridge, ma'am"—she was sorry.

"It is Adcock," said Mrs. Eldridge; and Harmood would bring her things down to save her going upstairs, and did so. During Harmood's absence the conversation could be rounded off and wound up.

"Am I to send the letter or not?" said Marianne. This was concession, for had she not flounced her intention of sending it in Mrs. Eldridge's face half-an-hour ago?

"Do as you like, dear! But I hope you won't. That's all I can say. Now good-night!" Charlotte's lips are extended as towards a farewell kiss; her hands tell well, anticipating embrace, and all her suggestions are graceful—as a lady's may be, who terminates musically in skirts.

But Marianne wants a straight tip for that letter.

"What am I to say, then?" says she doggedly. "Because I *must* write."

"Say what I told you, dear! So sorry—too much wanted at home to be able to come away just now—hope to see Miss Arkroyd . . . or Judith, if you call her Judith . . . in town before she goes away for good. Just a civil-letter sort of business! Don't you see how much better it will be yourself?" Harmood has come again, and is tendering a shroud from behind. Two hands accept it gracefully over each shoulder, and it abets the music of the skirts.

"I suppose it will," says Marianne doubtfully, and they go out to where Mr. Adcock awaits them. And then either of them who desires to do so may study the relations to one another of a very civil man with a flavour you would pronounce beer if encouraged by an expert; a four-wheeler he has to bang the door of—*you* are no good!—or it wouldn't shut; a horse that wants to be at home, and a summer moon doing its level best to make some birch-trees down the road look like silver. It is overhead, and you have to crane your neck to look at it.

Mrs. Challis did so, but saw nothing in it to make her eyes and lips less dry and hot. She returned to the drawing-room, and told Harmood not to shut the shutters; she would herself ultimately. Whereupon Harmood asked whether she would like anything. And being told she would like nothing else, thank you! said good-night, and was soon after audible passing upstairs with the plate, and not being absolutely cordial with Mrs. Steptoe.

Did Charlotte know how miserable she was making her? So thought the poor lady to herself as she looked out at the persevering moon. She felt feverish—and revengeful. Not with Charlotte, of course; a little aggravated, perhaps—that was all! But this girl—this Judith, with her insolent beauty and her knowledge of its power! This anxiety that she should go to Royd—what was it worth? Was she

asked because it was so clear the invitation would never be accepted, or because she was wanted to cover the position? One or the other, or something like it—no good or honourable motive!... Oh no!—nothing dishonourable, of course, in that sense—so Marianne reasoned with herself—but there were distinctions of honour and dishonour in higher strata of morality, above the gutter-ethics Charlotte would always be harping on. And yet!—suppose there had been any truth in that Steptoe legend, with the worst interpretations on it, might not Titus have concealed another self all along? He had concealed something: that she knew. Why not many things? Why not everything?

The condemned letter was not altogether judicious, but its very errors of judgment might have led to plain speech, recrimination, a storm, and a reconciliation. Anything would have been better, as the result showed, than an ill-constructed epistle Marianne wrote in the end, a message for her husband to pass on to Miss Arkroyd much on the lines Charlotte had suggested. Too many words for a message, too few for a letter from any wife to a husband under circumstances where brevity might be ascribed to pique. In which too she could not bring herself to the point of saying she hoped to see Miss Arkroyd, either in town or elsewhere, because she didn't. She hated Judith, but would not confess the reason to herself. So the letter worked out as nothing but a cold and civil message, refusing a very cordially written invitation. And it was all the worse that it contained a few lines in answer to Titus's last—not an unaffectionate epistle, written promptly on the evening of his arrival. But Marianne was a truthful person when her back was up, and wasn't going to tell any lies when candour tasted sweet in her mouth. So she indulged in a word or two of postscript on the back of the letter, and didn't quite like it when re-read. But really the text was just as bad without it. Look at the chilly "My dear Alfred," and "yr: aff: wife"! She fought off her vacillation, helped by a glance at Judith's letter and an allusion to her "dear husband"; closed the envelope, directed and stamped it, feeling determined, while she knew under the skin that she was wrong, and was showing a proper spirit.

Then, possessed by her evil genius, she must needs go downstairs, undo the front door and walk out in the sweet moonlight to the red pillar-box only a few paces off, that was so convenient. Then, when she had heard the letter fall to the bottom of the empty box, past hope, past help, past cure, she was sorry. Then she called herself a coward and went back to bed. But she felt like a criminal as she pushed open the door she had left unhasped.

What a many miscarriages proper spirits have to answer for!



## CHAPTER XXIX

THE persistent self-absorption and stunning monotonous clatter of one's fellow-creatures, however execrable it may seem when one wants to predominate over them by the legitimate employment of one's superior gifts—without shouting, you know!—may be not unwelcome when one longs for an excuse for silence, as Challis did after that unsettling interview with Judith—silence, and a little time to think things over before any further speech with the source of his disquiet. The more row other people were making, the better! This feeling was quite consistent with susceptibility to a magnetism which needed some device to veil its nature. He would call it tea, for the nonce, anyhow. He made tea the pretext to escape from his position of arbiter without rights of speech, and left the disputants, promising to return forthwith, and meaning to break his promise.

He made the most of the hundred yards to the tea-camp, nodding remotely to casuals by the way. He looked for an excuse to avoid joining the group at headquarters, who appeared at his distance off to be discoursing brilliantly, interestedly, on absorbing topics, with smiles. He knew they were talking nonsense about nothing particular, and was glad to find his excuse in Athelstan Taylor and his sister-in-law, who had joined the party, bringing with them their own little girls and the small cockney waif in blue, whose aunt was Mrs. Steptoe. That was how our Lizarann presented herself to Mr. Challis.

"I like you better than your aunt," said that gentleman candidly, when Lizarann was introduced.

"So do I," replied Lizarann. But this answer, clear as it's meaning was to all sympathetic souls, was taken exception to by the Rector's sister-in-law.

"What can the unintelligible child mean by that?" said

she. "Because you are unintelligible, you know you are, Lizarann!"

"Yass, please!" said Lizarann. And then she felt when people laughed that she was being treated like a child, which at her age was absurd.

Miss Caldecott, the sister-in-law, was one of those tiresome people who are always forming grown-up Leagues against children, and making it distinctly understood that these leagues, though ready to stoop to the level of children's understanding, do so under protest, and with reservations as to their own superiority. Miss Caldecott paraded hers, greatly to Lizarann's umbrage, in the tone in which she said, "We do not yet know, my dear, that Mr. Challis has an aunt"; into which tone she contrived to infuse a suggestion of respect for Challis's family, even if the previous generations consisted only of the direct line.

Challis refused to be taken into the League. To avoid it he stated that he had more aunts than was really the case. He went further, and ascribed to one of them attributes that have surely never belonged to any person's aunt. She had, he said, a front, and lived on tea-leaves, which came out on her person as a kind of stiff black net which he had the impudence to say he believed was never removed at night.

Lizarann recalled a like experience which she thought would bear repetition.

"Bridgetticks," she said, in a loud, outspoken way that commanded an audience, "she's a hunkle comes out a Sundays and Schristmas Day, and gold trimmings to his coat, and brarse buttons, and Bridgetticks, she could count up eight and two behind."

"You must try to say 'uncle,' my dear, not 'hunkle,'" said Miss Caldecott, which Lizarann did, meekly, with an impression that perhaps she had claimed too much for Old Shakey, which was the old man's bye-name in Tallack Street, where he appeared at intervals. She had used the "h" to give an adventitious force of character to the tremulous relic of better days she was referring to. She wished him to be thought of as resolute, without presenting him in the aspect of a swashbuckler.

"What do you make of *him*, Rector?" asked Challis.

"I know all about him. At least, Gus knows." Athelstan Taylor had appropriated a camp-stool, that he might accommodate Lizarann and his younger daughter on his knees. He looked round at his sister-in-law. "Don't you remember, my dear? Gus told us about him. A sort of old pensioner chap!"

Miss Caldecott remembered him, primly. "Not very sober, I fear!" said she.

Lizarann joined in the conversation. "Wunst you get him inside of the bust," she said, "the sconductor keeps his eye upon him. Yass!—All the way to Stockwell." Lizarann's confidence that her hearers knew the world had something very pretty and touching about it.

But Miss Caldecott, as the exponent of the League—which no one had asked her to form—checkmated Bridgett's relative. "We won't talk any more about him now, my dear," she said. The smallest shade passed over the Rector's face. However, it didn't matter for him. He could tickle Lizarann slightly, thanks to his position of vantage, and thus avoid being misunderstood.

With Challis it was otherwise. The effect upon his mind of the action of the League was that he now felt that Bridget's disreputable uncle was absolutely the only topic of conversation possible. He tried in vain to remember that anything else existed in the Universe.

"Mayn't we hear more about Miss Hicks's family?" said he, with some sense of proposing a compromise—not to run counter to the feeling of the League, as it were. Miss Caldecott said something confidentially to Space about not encouraging the child too much.

But she did not understand the earnestness and good faith of the said child. Lizarann had no suspicion that the gentleman's anxiety to know about her friend's connection was sheer affectation, and hastened to supply particulars. She proceeded to sketch the Hicks family, laying stress as much as possible on the excellence of its motives and the sobriety of its demeanour.

"Bridgetticks," she said, "she spinned her finger in the jam of the door, and felt it a week after in her shoulder-joint. Yass—she *did*! And Mr. 'Icks, he don't take nothing till after gone twelve o'clock, and then mostly at

meals. And Mrs. 'Icks, she never touches anything. Only then she never has scarcely no rheumatic pains to speak of."

"You see that point, Challis!" said the Rector parenthetically, in a quick undertone, over the heads of the two young ladies. "What Mr. 'Icks does touch is part of a course of treatment for rheumatism." Challis nodded the completeness of his understanding, and then the little girl Phoebe, who was listening with gravity, leaning on the shoulder of her father, said, "And then say why!"

Lizarann, prompted, continued, "Yass—she hasn't! Because of the nature of the suds. Because she's over her elbows all day, and can't roll nothin' up high enough, not to keep dry. And Dr. Ferris, he puts it down to the lump soda." An inquiring look of Challis's produced the additional information. "Yass!—you can buy it at the oil-shop just acrost the road from the Robin Hood. Only it comes to less by the quarter-hundredweight." All this did the greatest credit to Lizarann's power of storing information.

But the League had been tolerating this sort of thing too long, and its Secretary or Solicitor—whichever Miss Caldecott was—struck in with, "Perhaps we've talked qui-its enough now about Bridget Hicks and her family, my dear! We mustn't trespass too much on Mr. Challis's good-nature." Suspicion of the sinister intentions of the League gleamed in Lizarann's eye; for she disbelieved in its representative, while admitting her goodness. She might have ignored her intrusion if it had not been that the extraordinary sensitiveness of childhood to impressions that never penetrate the thick hide of manhood made her detect in Challis's disclaimer an understanding between himself and the League—one that civility had dictated reference to on his part, but that he would have preferred to conceal. Now Lizarann might have fallen back disconcerted on silence, even on tears, had it not been for Athelstan Taylor's keen understanding of children, and the supreme necessity for not letting them know allowances are being made for them. He said, with great presence of mind and an appearance of absolute sincerity: "Old Mrs. Fox sells it—where your Daddy lives, Lizarann. She'll

let you have twopenny-worth if you say it's for me. So mind you bring it on with you when you come home." For Lizarann was to call on her Daddy on her way back from this visit. The Rector added that he should like old Christopher to try it, and this confirmed Lizarann's belief in his *bona fides*. She would not have believed his sister-in-law, who, with the best intentions, had been unfortunate enough to incur unpopularity by throwing doubt on the Flying Dutchman. This was her chief offence; but she had also questioned the accuracy of the surgical reports of the boy Frederick Hawkins, and other minor matters. So that Lizarann, while she acknowledged her kindness, took a low view—but secretly—of her intelligence.

When the children had gone away dutifully to play, discussing by the way such things as might be played at with advantage, the Rev. Athelstan said, "Now I must be getting home, or I shall be late for Mrs. Silvertown." Said Mr. Challis: "Then I'll walk with you, Rector; I don't want any tea." Said the Rector: "Then I'll wait till you've had it," and waited. Presently they were walking through the long grass, overfield, having said little till the Rector spoke, as one who resumes conversation in earnest:

"What was all the interesting discussion about?"

"As far as I could gather—because they all spoke at once—they agreed in condemning the measure now before the House. But that may have been merely the common form of political discussion. There must be agreement about something to establish cordiality."

"Didn't they agree about anything else?"

"I think not—as far as I recollect. But really, in listening to discussions of this sort, I find myself handicapped by not understanding any of the terms in use. I am convinced I shall die in ignorance of what Secondary Education is, and though I talk confidently of University Extension, I am painfully conscious that the meaning I attach to it is founded, not on information of any sort, but on a washy inference that it can't mean anything else. So it's quite possible our friends were agreeing about something, and I didn't catch them at it."

"What had the M.P. to say?" asked the Rector.

"What M.P.'s generally do say. Things lay in nut-

shells, and called aloud for decisive handling, which there was but little reason to anticipate from a venal Press and an apathetic electorate. He would not presume to arraign the judgment of any fellow-mortal, but he would venture to call our attention to several things, and to lay before us a great variety of alternatives with which it would, sooner or later, be our bounden duty to grapple. He dwelt once more, at the risk of wearying his hearers, on the necessity for dealing with each political problem, as it arose, in a truly Imperial Spirit. I believe he did touch upon some aspects of the question of religious education, but then he also said he would not dwell upon them, and proceeded to consider everything else. I have a very vague idea of his views, but I understand they were luminous."

Athelstan Taylor thought he could detect in his friend to-day rather more than usual of his spirit of careless perversity. Something was the matter. But he made no attempt to find out what, and pursued the conversation.

"It would be interesting to know what he thought."

"It would—in view of the difficulty of inferring it from what he says. Mr. Brownrigg was more intelligible."

"What did he say?"

"Brownrigg pointed out. Of course! He pointed out that the subject had been exhaustively dealt with by Graubosch in his twenty-ninth volume. The forty-eighth chapter of that volume—one of its most brilliant passages—indicates the means by which all the objects of moral and religious education can be attained, without involving the instructor of youth in the solution of a single difficult problem. Strictly speaking, all such problems will at once disappear with the abolition of Morality, Religion, and Education—changes which form a fundamental feature of the scheme of Graubosch. But each of these will be more than replaced. The Great Doctrine of Retributive Inconvenience will result, as an inevitable consequence, in the Theory of the Avoidance of Retributive Inconvenience, which will attain all the ends Morality proposes to itself, but falls very short of. Religion will cease to be a necessity to a race of beings to whom it has been pointed out in their babyhood that they will do well to comply with the Apparent Aims of the Metaphysical Check, who will supply

more fully the place the human imagination has hitherto supplied with Deities so unsatisfactorily that even now monotheism is not quite agreed about their number . . ."

"Never mind me!" said the Rector, who thought Challis hesitated. "Go ahead!"

"Well—it was Brownrigg, you know; it wasn't me."

"It's all quite right, my dear fellow! I want to know now about the Education. Suppose a member of the human race refuses to pay any attention to the Apparent Aims of the Metaphysical Check . . ."

"He will come into collision, clearly, with the Doctrine of Retributive Inconvenience. In the case of young persons, on whom a certain amount of Inconvenience can be inflicted without overtaxing the Salaried Suggesters who will take the place of the so-called Educational Classes, an exact system might be formulated. Brownrigg gave as an example the case of a child refusing to comply with the System of Hypothetical Notification, under which it would be required to address propitiatory sentiments, or requests for personal benefit, to an unseen Metaphysical Check, whose hearing of the Application the Salaried Suggester might hold himself at liberty to guarantee. He might also—this was Brownrigg's point—endorse his suggestion, in the case of a child refusing to Notify, by the infliction of a certain amount of Inconvenience, tending to produce, if not an actual belief in the existence of the Metaphysical Check, at any rate a readiness to confess it, which would be for working purposes exactly the same."

The Rector shook his head doubtfully. "At present," said he, "the practice in this village is to threaten rebellious youth with the wicked fire. Would Brownrigg's substitute be as effectual?"

"You remember what he said in September—that Graubosch meant to retain the Personal Devil until the new System had had time to settle down? Just as people keep the gas on till the electric light is a certainty!"

The Rector laughed. "You'll make me as bad as yourself, Challis, before you've done." Then he became more serious. "I would give a good deal," said he, "to know what you *really* think on matters of this sort."

But Challis was persuading a pipe to light inside his hat,

and no immediate answer came. One vesta had perished in the attempt. The second made a lurid flash on his face, in the shadow of the protecting hat, his invariable grey felt. As Athelstan Taylor looked at him, he saw again, more clearly than before, that the face was inconsistent with its owner's levity of tone two minutes since. He negatived his own impulse to ask questions, and waited. Perhaps it was part of a growing interest in his companion that made him mix with this curiosity, about what was going on inside that head, a wish to see the hat back on it. For the sun was still fierce at the end of a hot June day, and the soft brown hair the wind blew about so easily seemed to have little shelter in it for the somewhat delicate skin the blue veins made so much show on, below on the forehead.

"You would give a good deal," said Challis, when the pipe was well alight, "to know what I think about the religious education of children? So would I!" It was a disappointing ending. His hearer had expected something better.

"What have you done about your own boy?" said he, with a kind of magnanimous impatience. "Come! That's the point."

"Nothing. At least, I have sent him to Rugby, where he will be brought up a member of the Church of England."

"But before?"

"I left him to his mother—at least, his aunt. . . . I told you. . . ."

"I know."

"So you observe that with respect to Master Bob I have pursued a policy of well-considered devolution of responsibility. Perhaps I should say of evasion. However, I think I may lay claim to having given my son every reasonable opportunity of believing the creeds that will best advance his interests in the world. He has had the advantage of imbibing them from a lady who enjoys the privilege of being able to believe what she chooses, and has inherited or selected the tenets of the well-to-do. He has been till lately at a preparatory Academy, where every one of the masters is in orders, and every other boy the son of a Bishop. And now he's gone to Rugby! What can a human father do more, in the name of respectability?"



"My dear Challis, if you want to make your son's education a text for a sermon against worldliness and hypocrisy, do so by all means. We have weak joints enough in our armour, God knows, for you to shoot your arrows into. But let me finish finding fault with you first."

Challis slipped his arm into the Rector's. "Go on finding fault," he said. "Don't finish too soon."

"I won't. It seems to me, my dear friend, that under cover of a complete confession you have contrived to raise issues which have nothing to do with the question before the House, which I take to be—what is a father's conscientious duty towards the child for whose existence he is partly responsible? I want to keep you to the point."

"I'm a slippery customer, I know. Go on."

"Do you, or do you not, think a parent is bound to supply a child with a religious faith? Failing the parent, is it the duty of the guardian—of the State? That seems to me to lie at the root of all questions of religious education. But our question is about the parent's duty when one exists. *Exempli gratia*, yourself and Master Bob! It seems to me that your policy was one of evasion, and that the devolution of responsibility upon your wife was a rather cowardly evasion. Especially as her responsibility could only be for her own children!"

Challis's hand pressed the arm he held a little more warmly. There was certainly no offence. "You are perfectly right, Rector," said he. "I took a mean advantage of a little local patch of obscurantism to get my boy inoculated in his youth with a popular form of Christianity, in order that his father's heretical ideas should not stand in the way of his advancement. But I lay this unction to my soul, that if ever he sees his way to a bishopric, nothing I have ever said to him need stand in his way. . . . Oh no!—there is no idea at present of his entering the Church. The Army is engaging his attention at this moment—and phonographs. . . . But go on pitching into me about cowardly evasions."

"I am afraid you are incorrigible, Challis. I can't help laughing sometimes. But for all that, I think you were wrong. You were wrong towards your wife, because, in-

stead of helping her, you made her task difficult. What can be harder than to turn a child's mind into any channel with a strong counter-influence, as a father's must needs be, constantly at work against one's efforts?"

Challis smiled in his turn. "It was Marianne, you see," he said. "I can't express it. The position was harder to deal with than you think." He then went on to tell one or two incidents connected with Bob's early indoctrinations of the Scriptures. How, for instance, when Marianne once crushed him under, "You know perfectly well, Titus, what the words of Our Lord were," and followed it up with a quotation, he had remarked in the presence of Master Bob that at any rate Jesus Christ didn't speak English; and then she had flounced out of the room white with anger, and not spoken to him for two days; and when she did at last, it was to declare that if there was to be any more blasphemy and impiety before the boy, she should go straight away to Tulse Hill, and not come back. Also, when he once innocently remarked that he believed there was now a tram-line from Joppa to Jerusalem, she had become very violent, and accused him of speaking of Jerusalem as if it was a place in Bradshaw.

The Rector considered, and then said: "I was just going to say Mrs. Challis must be unusually ill-informed, when I happened to recollect what a number of very good people are exactly like her. In fact, a very dear old friend of mine"—he was thinking of the Rev. Mr. Fossett—"is rather shocked when he hears Our Lord spoken of as a real person; and with him it isn't exactly ignorance, because he's a priest in orders. It's a phase of mind that seems to have its source in a belief that nothing can be both Good and Actual." He stopped abruptly, as one who changes a subject. "By-the-bye, should you have said the little person looked delicate—that little Lizarann, I mean?"

Challis had to stop to think. "N-no!" he said. "On the contrary, I thought she had such a good colour." On which the Rector said, "Ah—well!" and then more cheerfully, "Well—well!—I suppose it's all right. However, we must keep our eyes open."

"Isn't the child strong? She's a funny little party."

"Why, no!—they say she isn't. Isn't strong, I mean. Never mind! What were we talking about?"

"People and Scripture, don't you know. Things being actual. . . ."

"I know. I was just going to tell you what dear old Gus—my friend—won't forgive me for. I'll risk it. Only don't you make copy of it. . . . Very well!—mind you don't. . . . It was this. Some years ago I was urging him to marry, and he pleaded in extenuation of his celibacy that he wished to model his life on Our Lord's in every point within his power. 'It's all very fine,' I said. 'But why do you suppose the Apostles did not model their lives on Our Lord's? Do you mean that they all led celibate lives?' Gus said this was almost an insinuation that Our Lord was or had been married. I'm sorry to say I couldn't help saying, 'Can you produce a single particle of direct evidence that Our Lord was not a widower when John baptized Him?' Gus hardly spoke to me all that day. But what hurt him was the realism of the expression 'widower.' The case was exactly on all fours with your wife's."

They were just in sight of the Rectory, and Challis had to get back in time for dinner. So he shook hands with his friend, remarking: "You will go on blowing me up another time." Athelstan Taylor replied with a cordial handshake. "You deserve it, you know!" and pulled out his watch. "I shall be in time for Mrs. Silvertown," said he. But who and what that lady was this story knoweth not, neither whence she came nor whither she went. But she occurs in the text for all that.

Challis wandered back, having intentionally allowed himself time to do so, keeping out of the direct path to avoid meeting people. He liked his own company best.

His talk with Athelstan Taylor, which else could claim little place in the story, had had a curious effect on him. It had brought back vividly his early days with his wife. As he sauntered on with his eyes on the ground, choosing rather destructively special whitey-green heads of new young fern to crush down, or cutting here and there an inoffensive flower with his stick, his ears heard nothing of the wind-music in the trees, his eyes saw nothing of the evening

rabbits, popping away and vanishing one by one—for which of them could say he had no gun, off-hand?—as he approached. The small village maiden who stopped and stood still through a blank bar, and dropped a semiquaver curtsey in the middle, and then went on *andante capriccioso*, might almost as well not have been there for any notice Challis took of her. His thoughts were back in Great Coram Street, in the dingy London home this Marianne—yes! this very Marianne—made cheerful, more than cheerful, to the industrious accountant of ten years since; who parted from her each morning looking forward to the return each evening brought to the grubby domicile he associated with so many blackbeetles in the impenetrable basement, such smells of mice in spite of such much stronger smells of cats, and the wails and choral conclusions of these last in the backyard they held against all comers, in the small hours of so many foggy mornings.

How many escapes from the fog without to the firelight within could he recall, in those days when he rose from his office-desk without a dream of what he could have used his brain for, instead of those interminable figures! How many a shock of trivial disappointment to find that Missis wasn't home yet!—how many an insignificant reviving thrill of contentment when Missis's knock followed near upon his own arrival and his thwarted expectation! For now and again it must happen to a man that some woman he has no passionate love for, pedantically speaking, shall grow round his heart and make the comfort of his life. That was the sort of thing that had come to pass in the case of Marianne and Alfred Challis. And now, as he—the flattered guest of folk he then had never thought to sit at meat with—passed up the great beech-avenue to the house, respectfully saluted by a great gamekeeper, a Being who, in those older years, would simply have spurned him, his thoughts had all gone back to the rosy, if rather short-tempered girl who then seemed plenty for his life, and might surely have remained so, only . . . only Challis couldn't finish the sentence. Now, why was he, in his own mind, commenting a moment after on the *inappropriateness* of two lines of Browning that had come into it:

" . . . Strange, that very way  
Love begun ! I as little understand  
Love's decay."

He resented their intrusion. Who would dare to say his affection for Marianne was not what it had always been ? It was—he would swear it !—and that in spite of the fact that Marianne, look you, was not now what she was in those days.

How and when had the change come over things ? He was on the alert to keep Judith out of the answer to this question. He must see to that, or Unfairness, that was in the air, would twist awry the admiration of her beauty that was all mankind's—womankind's, for that matter, jealousy apart !—and put a misconstruction on his simplest actions, his most obvious feelings. He could have held his head up better, true enough, over this passage of his analytical self-torment, if only it had not been for that unhappy revelation of unspoken suspicion, by the river there, not two hours since. But be fair !—be fair ! It *was* unspoken, at least ! Who had said anything ? As he asked the question of himself, Challis wiped from his brow perspiration he ascribed to the weather !

Did he not know of old how often he had deceived himself ? Might not all this be self-delusion, too ? At least, he had as good a vantage-ground as the man to whom some woman may often say, truly : " You have looked love, and there has been love in the pressure of your hand, in the tone of your voice. But I cannot indite you. Live safe behind your equivocations." Nay, he was safer than such a one ! For in his case the more he could ignore love, the better he would discharge his duty to Judith. The other man would be the greater sneak, the more he did so.

But the question—the question ! It was still unanswered. When did the change come over Marianne ? Oh, he knew perfectly well ! It was from the day when he began, to all seeming at her request, to go out into this accursed Society without her. Very well, then !—it was all mere glamour, the whole thing. Let him do now what he should have done at first—insist on her being his companion, among his kind as well as in his home. Then would the old Marianne come back, and all would be well.

So, by the time he was two-thirds through the avenue, his thoughts had worked back into his old existence, and taken him with them. If only his knowledge of his surroundings in his daily life at home would bear him out, and help him to keep at bay this image of Judith that forced itself upon him now—this image of her in the sunset last September, just on this very spot!

What he recognised at once as the nose of a large grey boarhound touched him gently, and he turned. There stood Saladin, satisfied to all seeming that what he had smelt was in order, but content to take no further steps. Challis glanced round, expecting to see the dog's mistress; in a sense rather afraid to do so. She was near at hand, a few paces from the pathway, and her perfect self-possession reassured him.

"I never told Saladin to disturb your reverie, Mr. Challis," she said, quite easily, and with deliberation. "The darling acted on his own responsibility." Saladin, hearing his own name, seemed to think he had leave to go, and trotted on, giving attention to tree-trunks and the like. Challis had to say something.

"Are we not late for dinner?" was what it came to.

"I believe we are, but it never matters. Did you get your letter?"

"No—I got no letter. What letter?"

"Haven't you been up at the house? It was there when I went back. I thought it looked like your wife's handwriting. I hope it's to say we shall see her on Saturday."

"I hope so, too." But Challis wasn't sanguine.

No pretence that no embarrassment exists between two people, however determined, can do more than encourage a hope that a *modus vivendi* may be found. These two persevered in theirs, because each hoped for a working pretext that would carry Challis's visit through, without further useless complications, and this one of Marianne was a good one to make a parade of their detachment about. See how anxious we both are to emphasize the perfect self-possession a friendship like ours allows!—was what it seemed to say. Each knew it was a pretext, but each was loyally ready to accept the other's belief in it as a reality.

So when Judith said those last words of hers, Challis went so cordially through the form of believing her in earnest that he powerfully helped the image he had set his mind to construct of a Marianne based on his impressions—illusions, if you must have it so!—of ten years past. Conversation that followed on the way to the house, artificial though it might be, all tended towards a cheap local apotheosis of Marianne, with a beneficial side-influence on her husband's disposition to idealise her. Thus Judith: "Of course, a change would do her so much good. House-keeping is tiresome work."

"Yes," said Challis. "It's wearing! And if you understand what I mean, it makes her unlike herself."

"Oh, I understand so exactly. Everyone would—every woman, I mean. It has nothing to do with ill-temper."

"Nothing whatever!" Challis made the most of this.

"There isn't a better-tempered creature in the world than Polly Anne." He called her a creature, though, to keep the position properly qualified. "And one knows what children are."

"They are darling little people." Judith yawned slightly. "But they are nicest when you know them as acquaintances. Too much intimacy palls. Unless they are very nice children. I am sure yours are. But all the same, Marianne would be the better for a change." And so on. But there was very little life in this talk.

None the less, Challis was feeling good about his wife, when he reached the house looking forward to finding Marianne's letter awaiting him, and carried it up into his room to read it. He was more curious to read it than to wait for the arrival of the motor, whose hoot had just become audible from somewhere near the park-gate, a mile off. Saladin immediately started at a gallop either to sanction or condemn it, and Judith lingered, awaiting its arrival.

"I see Mr. Challis didn't go to Ashcroft," is what Sibyl says first to her sister. It refers to a projected excursion, a full day long, which had been cancelled after the departure of the motor in the morning.

Judith looks ostentatiously indifferent. "No one went," she says. "It was given up. But how came you to know?"

"That Mr. Challis didn't go! We saw you from the Links, walking together in the avenue."

Judith turns with handsome languor to Lord Felixthorpe, the other occupant of the motor. "Did she?" she says. "Did you? I mean." Sibyl says: "Thank you for doubting my word! The avenue is visible from the Links."

His lordship is deliberate, as usual. The answer to Judith's first question is, he says, in the affirmative; to the second, in the negative. Identification, even of eminent authors, at a distance in an evening light, is difficult when a time-limit is fixed by the rapid locomotion of the observer. Sibyl's comment, in an undertone, Judith understands to be a caution against prosiness. But a respectful reference by Elphinstone to the many minutes ago that the first gong sounded causes a hurried flight to dress.

Challis felt good about his wife as he opened her letter; and the feeling grew rather than lessened when he saw how short it was. She must be coming, that was clear! But the satisfaction in his face died out as his eye caught the "Yr: aff: wife" at its conclusion. He read the two ill-covered pages twice and again before he threw it down with an angry "Humph!" and set himself to make up for lost time with his toilet.

He only just succeeded in scrambling into his coat in time for the second, or heart-whole, dinner-bell. All right!—he would run, directly. But it would only make him a minute late to glance once more at that letter. Besides, he could do it as he went downstairs. He did so, and ended by pocketing it just in time to appear last in the drawing-room, apologetic.



## CHAPTER XXX

THAT was a very fortunate interview in the park-avenue between Challis and Miss Arkroyd. If their sequel to that half-hour before they joined the tea-party, when they stood hand-in-hand on the edge of a volcano, had been a stiff meeting in society, the position would have become a rigid one; its joints would have ossified. Some may hold that it would have been best that they should do so, and that the lubrication of this interview was really unfortunate. It depends on how one looks at it. Efficacious it certainly was.

So efficacious that Challis almost felt at liberty to be sorry that Judith was moved to the far end of the long table at dinner, beyond his range of communication. He grudged the geometrical distance between them, while he acknowledged their moral or spiritual *éloignement*. He had to confess to his regret when a fresh dress she had on that evening rustled and glittered—it was all sparks and flashes—past the place she occupied the evening before. “We move up, like the Hatter and the Dormouse,” said she to her partner.

The house-party had become enormous; indeed, some of it had oozed out into an adjoining apartment, and had a little round table all to itself—which it may be said to have forgotten, for it made a great noise.

Challis's own flank-destinies for this dinner were an elderly young lady with a bridge to her nose—a county family in herself—whom he had protected through the dangerous passage from the drawing-room; and the extraneous chit, Lady Henrietta Mounttullibardine. The latter had been provided with a counterchit, who was always spoken of as Arthur, and seemed to be many people's cousin. The former had a powerful pair of eyeglasses on a yard-arm, or sprit, workable from below; these, Challis

noticed, were manœuvred so as to leave the bridge free. He imputed powder, or something that might come off, to its owner. She seemed to have been very carefully prepared to go into Society, and to look down on it now that she had arrived. But she had to be talked to about something within its confines, and Challis had to find out what.

"I wonder what the brilliant stuff is called," said he, therefore. Judith's dress was the stuff.

"Sequin net is the name, I believe." This suggested somehow that the stuff's sphere was one grade below the speaker's.

"How much is a sequin?" asked Challis.

"It is not an expensive material," said the lady.

"I don't want a dress for myself," said Challis.

"Oh, indeed!" said the lady. Settlements ensued. And then Challis's other neighbour addressed him.

"They are in the other room this evening," said the chit. Her remark related to a mutual confidence between herself and Challis, begun on the lawn on the day of his arrival. They never spoke of anything else.

"I can hear them," said he. "They're making noise enough. But I thought they had quarrelled this morning?"

"This morning—oh yes!" This was very *empressé*.

"But they made that up long ago!"

"When do they?... when are they?... when will it?... Clear, please! Oh no!—that'll do beautifully. I meant thick." This was to the servant, respecting soup.

"I'm so afraid it never *will*! Do you know, I really *am*!"

"Instances are not wanting of young ladies and gentlemen who haven't got married.... Hock, thank you!"

"Of course! But they *always* do, if they *can*. Don't they now, Mr. Challis?"

"I admit it. Unless they meet with some one they like better. Of course, that does happen."

"Oh yes—of course! But then it only matters when it isn't *both*." Challis, on the watch for copy, noticed that whenever this chit italicised a word—which was frequently—she opened her large blue eyes as far as possible.

"You express it to perfection. When it's both, it doesn't matter the least. But this time it's neither, so far!"

"Oh no!—they can't *look* at anyone else."

"Nothing can be more satisfactory. But why shouldn't it!... why shouldn't they!..."

"Oh dear! I'm so afraid they never will. Because he has only his pay, and she has—*nothing!*" Human eyes have only limited powers of opening, and the speaker's had done all they could.

"Couldn't a rich aunt settle something on them, or some one place a fund at their disposal? Or something of that sort?... What a shindy they are making!... Not before Christmas." This was because his left-hand neighbour had said sternly: "When is your next book coming out, Mr. Challis?"

But the chit had a secret knowledge of the *vera causa* of the riot in the next room, where three chits and as many counterchits, uncontrolled, had the small round table to themselves. She knew exactly what they were doing—trying to pick up tumblers upside down, like this!—"this" being the thumb on one side, and one finger only on the top.

"I have forgotten when your last book came out, Mr. Challis." The left-hand neighbour seemed reproachful. But Challis couldn't help it. "Just eight weeks ago," said he.

A lull came in the next room, with the young soldier's voice audible in it, "Now all together, or it doesn't count!" Some sort of wager was being put to the test. Challis's chit murmured in the moments of suspense that followed, "They broke several yesterday in the billiard-room." Challis, amused, waited for the inevitable smash.

It came, and was a grand one. And the chorus of contrition and apology from the culprits was only equalled by their indignation at the way the Laws of Nature had proved broken reeds. If there was one thing more than another that the student of dynamics could not have credited, it was that under the circumstances a single tumbler should have been broken. Challis perceived that Lady Arkroyd spoke *sotto voce* to Mr. Elphinstone, who, he thought, replied, "Plenty, your ladyship. They came this morning." Then followed a fine exhibition of dexterity in the rapid collection and removal of broken glass. Challis thought to himself, but did not say so, that it reminded one of being on board ship.

The chit had done her duty by Mr. Challis, and now deserted him. Arthur had done his by Mrs. Ramsey Tomes, on his other flank, who had told him she wasn't quite sure if Mr. Tomes approved of football. She was almost certain he thought young men gave up too much time to rowing, and cricket, and lawn-tennis, and cycling, and everything else, and perfectly certain he didn't disapprove of anti-vivisection or anti-vaccination, but she wasn't quite sure which. She was not a gifted person, and was quite unable to keep pace with her husband's powerful mind. She had been freely spoken of before now, by heedless linguists, as a Juggins. Arthur deserted her with a sense of duty done, and passed the remainder of the banquet in exchanging wireless undertones with his other neighbour. It was wonderful how much communication they seemed to get through, considering how little noise they made. It seemed to be done with eyebrows, slight facial adaptations, new ways of keeping lips closed, but rarely completed speech.

Challis was conscious that each of these young people would be the other's *menu* for the rest of the banquet, so he surrendered himself to a portentous catechism from the lady with the eyeglass touching his habits.

"Where do you write, Mr. Challis?"

"At home—when I'm at home. Or wherever I happen to be at the time." When he had said this, he wondered whether he was going idiotic. It was like saying a mother was always present at the birth of her child.

"But upstairs or down? And is the room at the back of the house?" He gave close particulars of all the rooms at the Hermitage. A capital way of making conversation! But in the end it ran dry.

"I like writing in bed," said he, for variety. "Rabelais wrote in bed." He wasn't sure of this at all. But it didn't matter.

"Oh, indeed!" said the lady. She was an Honourable Miss Something, and not nearly dissolute enough to know anything about authors who write in bed; and, besides, she had her doubts about Rabelais. She changed the conversation delicately. Did Mr. Challis use a Fountain Pen? No, he didn't. Because he thought for a quarter

of an hour at every third word, and that was time enough for an active person under fifty to dip his pen in the ink. Pressmen had to write straight on without stopping. The lady took this seriously, and said, "Dear me!"

What followed was very like the sample. Challis could make talk and think of something else quite well. So he thought how different his right-hand neighbour was from Charlotte Eldridge. And that set him a-thinking again about his wife. But there were unnavigable straits in that sea. His thoughts got into shoal-water, and his neighbour pursued a topic unaccompanied until she found she had left him behind. Then indignation kindled, but subject to good-breeding. She would put a test question, though, to see how much attention this gentleman had been paying.

"How many words are there in a book?" The question came with sudden severity, and Challis had to pull himself together to reply.

"Of course," he said, "there's not always exactly the same number. But a hundred thousand, more or less." It was a good answer, and embodied a feeling current in the book-trade. And the conversation, thus re-established, developed on the same lines until the vanishing-point of the army of womankind. Challis fancied he saw commiseration on Judith's face as she brought up the rear. He certainly had seldom in his life passed a duller hour.

He knew what it was going to be next. Dreary politics, wearisome ethics, maudlin philosophy, execrable—thrice execrable!—Social Problems which it was every man's duty to confront, and every other man's duty to hear him elucidate. Yes!—there was Mr. Ramsey Tomes at it already! He had got a good new word to talk with—"noumenal"—and was brandishing it over his hearers' heads....

Oh dear!—Metaphysics! Not even free treatment of what Challis's mind classed as Charlottology! That always appealed to our common something or other. Now what he could catch at first hearing seemed bare, cold, cruel Metaphysics. Never an indiscreet lady nor an unprincipled gentleman, nor even a New Morality, of any sort! No fun at all!

But stop a bit! Was there none? Challis listened,

and perceived, before coffee-time, that the changed guest of last September, who had become a Complete Christian Scientist, had denied the existence of matter. He took a chair nearer to the discussion, not to seem out of it, and so attracted to himself the attention of Mr. Ramsey Tomes, whose lung-power had taken possession of the rostrum.

"I appeal," said that gentleman, "to Mr. Challis." He went on with a testimonial or appreciation beginning with "than whom I will venture to say," and elucidating Challis's great accomplishments and intellectual powers. Challis seized the opportunity of a coffee-deal to ask what he was being appealed to about. A mixed response informed him on this point. A definition of Matter had been called for, and the Confirmed Christian Scientist had demurred to giving any such definition. "No one," said he, "can be logically called on to define a thing he denies the existence of. The burden of definition manifestly lies with those who affirm it."

"Personally," said Challis, "I prefer—but I admit it may be only idiosyncrasy on my part—to know, when I deny the existence of anything, what the thing is that I am denying the existence of. Perhaps I should say, rather, what it would be if it existed. If I knew. I think I should always communicate my knowledge, both from civility and as a politic act. For how the dickens anyone else would know what I was denying the existence of if I didn't tell him, I'll be hanged if I know!"

An indignant murmur was perceptible round the table. It gathered force, and became a protest against this treatment of the subject. Everybody, it said, knew perfectly well what matter *was*. All that was wanted was a Definition of it.

"What is Matter?" said Challis. But he had some difficulty in hearing all the answers to this question. However, he caught the following:

"Obviously, there is no such distinct thing as Matter. What we call matter—stuff, substance, body, or what not—is really only a manifestation of energy."

"Obviously, Matter is a phenomenon."

"Obviously, Matter is the negation of mind."

"Obviously, Matter is the antithesis of spirit."

"Obviously, Matter is the reciprocal interdependent externalisation of what used at one time to be called Forces, but which are now almost universally recognised to be merely modes of motion."

"Something you can prod." This last piece of crudity came from the young man Arthur, and attracted no attention.

Now, when several persons shout simultaneously a profound and intuitive judgment apiece, each naturally pauses to hear what effect his own has had upon the Universe. An opening for speech is then given to anyone who has the presence of mind to abstain from wasting time over the detection of a stray meaning anywhere. In this case Mr. Ramsey Tomes saw his opportunity, and seized it.

"Am I mistaken," said he, "in supposing that at least one suggestion has been made that the Universe, as at present formulated, has but two constituents—namely, the subject under discussion, Matter, on the one hand; and on the other what has been variously called Mind or Spirit. Shall I presume too far on the attention the Philosophical Mind is prepared to vouchsafe to the voice of a mere sciolist in Metaphysical profundity if I indicate the existence of yet a third constituent of what has been not inaptly called the Universal Whole? I refer to what I may term the Unknown."

The speaker felt that this was so admirably expressed that he rashly paused to lick his lips over it. This gave Challis, who was in a malicious or impish mood, time to interject a remark. Its effect was that, for the purpose of discussing the Existence of Matter, no definition of it would be of any use to us, unless we provided ourselves also with an accurate definition of Existence. Agreement on these two points would enable us to *approfondir* the question of the entity or nonentity of the appreciable Universe.

There seemed to be no serious difficulty, unless it were the selection of the required definitions from an *embarras de richesses*. Among those which survived the tumult of many confident voices, Challis distinguished the following:

"The relation a thing has to itself."

"The condition precedent of the concept 'nothing,' which is itself a fundamental condition of thought."

"A quality thought imputes to the external cause of every phenomenon."

"The recognition by the Ego of the reality of its environments."

"When you've nothing particular to do." This one was Arthur, who, however, was heard a moment after to say, "All right; I'll come!" in response to a summons, and thereafter went, carrying away his unfinished cigar. Challis heard his voice afar very soon, probably in the garden in the moonlight, where chits and counter-chits were in council on the lawn. He wanted to go out in that garden himself, but—he supposed—he recognised the reality of his environments, like the Ego, and felt that such conduct would be rude. Besides, he was rather amused, too. What was that Mr. Brownrigg was saying?

He was pointing out, of course. Nay, more!—he was pointing out that Graubosch had already pointed out, in his Appendix B, that we had no direct evidence of any existence whatever independently of a percipient. The Confirmed Christian Scientist applauded this audibly, but remarked that that was merely Immanuel Kant, after all! On the other hand, Mr. Brownrigg continued, we have not a particle of evidence that any percipient could exist as such, independent of a percipiendum. We could not collect his evidence, clearly, without exposing ourselves to his untried observation, and thereby upsetting the conditions of the problem.

The Confirmed Christian Scientist's face fell, and he asked dejectedly, What conclusion did Graubosch draw? Mr. Brownrigg replied that Graubosch considered the problem afforded a fine instance of Metaphysical Equilibrium, which would under that name continue to engage the attention of thinkers long after the Insolubility of Problems had ceased to be admitted as a Scientific possibility. The final solution of all questions could not be regarded with complacency by a thoughtful world; and the recognition of Metaphysical Equilibrium, in questions which the Primitives of Philosophy had condemned as unanswerable, was a welcome addition to the resources of Modern Thought, for which the world had to thank its originator and greatest exponent, Graubosch, et cetera.



Challis began to think he must really make an effort, and go. He would watch for an opportunity. It came.

The advocates of the Existence of Matter were disposed to make a stand in favour of Human Reason; in fact, they were inclined to claim for Man, before the dawn of sight, hearing, or feeling, the position of a Unit charged with Syllogism, ready to make short work of any Phenomenon that might present itself. But, then, how about anthropoid apes? Didn't Sally count up to five? Well, then—Reason be blowed! Make it perception, and include all forms of Life.

This brought up Mr. Ramsay Tones in great force. We were now landed, he said, in a crux on the axis of which this most interesting group of problems might be said to rotate. Let the many-headed activities of Ratiocinative Speculation agree on a Definition of Life, and he would venture to say without fear of contradiction that a keynote would have been struck that would resound through the proper quarters. Challis missed their description, owing to Mr. Brownrigg's voice intercepting it resolutely.

"Surely," said he, "we need go no further than the one supplied by Herbert Spencer." Everyone listened with roused attention, and Mr. Brownrigg continued. "You will all recall it at once! 'The definite combination of heterogeneous changes, both simultaneous and successive, in correspondence with external coexistences and sequences.' It is among the few decisions of modern thought which Graubosch has been able to accept intact; and the translation he himself made of it into German surpasses, if anything, its English original in force and lucidity."

Challis thought he might go. No need to stay for the German translation. Or the way from the entrance-hall into the garden, he nearly collided with the largest possible white shirt-front associated with the smallest possible black waistcoat. The owner, Arthur, the universal cousin, begged his pardon. He begged it awfully, it seemed; but why? What he added, before going away up the broad staircase four steps at a time, was enigmatical: "No gloves—only I can lend Jack a pair." Challis left the meaning of this in a state of Metaphysical Equilibrium, till the sound of music under moonlit cedars on the lawn

explained it. A chit-extemporised dance was afoot on the close-cropped turf. Challis remembered this young sub-altern's definition of Existence, and felt he knew what sort of definition of Life his would be.

He himself would not mix with it, under the cedars there, but would finish his cigar with his arms crossed on this ledge of clean stone balustrade, all silvery with lichens in the moonlight, where he would see and not be seen. Perhaps he would remember the name of the little creeping flowers that last September were climbing all over the shrub that half hid him; that were only pledges as yet, but that he knew the morning sun would soon make rubies of. Cockney that he was, he had had to ask the little flower's name of Judith, as she stood on that gravel path below, near ten months back. What a short time it seemed! Petroleum?—No!—Protsolum, was it?—No!—that wasn't it exactly. But near enough!...

Footsteps were coming along the pathway now. Was it honourable to overhear what those two girls were discussing in the moonlight? Pooh!—stuff and nonsense! Those chits—the idea! What *could* those children have to say that they could mind his hearing? Besides, they would never know; and he could cough at a moment's notice.

"You could have lawts of awfers, if you liked, Flawcey. I know a girl that's had eleven awfers. I've had three awfers. I suppose now it is Jack I shan't have any maw awfers." The sweet drawler, who is of course the speaker, has rather a rueful sound over this.

"I could have been engaged twice," says the other; "only one was forty-five, and the other was a Hungarian."

They do not interest the drawler. She ripples on musically: "Of cawce, I shall have Cerberus, because he belawngs to Jack. Oh, he is a dahling!" Then the two go out of hearing; but the drawl is there, in the distance still. Challis notes afar, under the cedar-trees, how Chinese lanterns are coming to birth in the twilight. There will only be real darkness quite late to-night.

Two other voices are audible near for a few seconds, with a roused interest for Challis, whose sense of eavesdropping increases. Before he can decide on stopping his ears, he has heard Sibyl say: "I have eased my conscience, and

you can't blame *me*, whatever happens!" She is speaking as one who has the Universe on her shoulders. Judith's answer is lost, rather to his relief, all but the *limbre* of its resentment.

Here come the chits back! *They* don't matter. What's the story now?

"Oh, it was hawrible! If only it had been an awdinary eyeglass, with a string!"

"But then it would have had to be fished up, you know!"

"Of cawce it would. I didn't think of that. Perhaps it's just as well it wawse a lens. . . . No, it was quite easy how it happened, if you think!"

"But whatever did you do?"

"Of course, d'ya, we both pretended it had rolled on the floor, and kneeled down to look for it. But we both knew quite well where it was, and I could feel it cold all down my back. Oh, it was hawrible!" The speaker added thoughtfully after a pause: "I am so glad it's Jack now, and not Sholto. He did look such a fool, and *such* strong cigars!"

Challis was able, being a dramatist, to put an intelligible construction on this little dramatic experience of the young lady and her previous admirer. We need not probe into its obscurity, as its only interest in this story is that it reminded him of an incident of his own bygone youth—the disappearance of a pearl from a ring of his first wife's, and its resurrection from the inside of his own stocking after setting him limping, inexplicably, all the way home to his rooms from her mother's house. Oh, the ridiculous trifles of life!—nothing at the time, but all-powerful for sadness in the days to come.

So powerful, in this case, that he was less than ever ready for the sphere of pink and green illumination and dance-music, just becoming self-assertive. Of course!—those young monkeys were hanging about in the suburbs merely in order to be fetched. They knew their value, bless you! So Challis thought to himself as he lit another cigar, sauntering among the cut yew-hedges of a side-garden. A wing of the house was between him and the dancers, and their sounds were dim. But from a back-window of the room he had left a quarter of an hour since still came such noise as is inevitable when a number of

close reasoners with strong lungs go seriously to work on the Nature of Things, and point out each other's fallacies. "Word-changers in the Temple of the Inscrutable," thought Challis to himself, as he turned to seek congenial silence farther afield.

He would find it, he knew, if it were nowhere else in the world, in the sweet little rose-garden called, for no sane reason, "Tophet."

He and Judith had walked there more than once on his previous visit, and he had surmised that its most inapt name might be connectable with the now common word *toff*, meaning a person of birth and position—a descendant of ancestors. Judith had asked why, and he had told her she would never be an etymologist at that rate. Bother *why*!

It was a very exclusive little garden certainly—if that would make a reason—with four high stone walls and a very small door with a very large key. Perhaps this was locked. It was sometimes. But no one had ever confessed to having locked it. And the large key always hung on a hook almost in the lock's pocket, so to speak. A very old gardener had told Challis it was done on the understanding it might be used. "I see," said Challis. "'Locke on the Understanding.'" And the old gardener had said "Ah!" with perfect unsuspicion.

This night it seemed that some one had taken advantage of the understanding, for the key was in the lock, and the door stood partly open. Some one must be inside. There was an unaccountable little grating in the door one could look through. Challis did so, and saw who it was—the woman in the moonlight.

It was strange how his relations with this woman had changed since their walk by the river two days since; when, mind you!—not a word had been spoken to which either ascribed a meaning that could have changed them. A few days ago theirs was a normal friendship enough, bearing in mind difference of age and social standards; always factors in human problems all the world over, shut our eyes to them as we may! Now, the web of his consciousness at least was shot with a new disturbing tint. Why, in Heaven's name, else, need his first instinct be to turn and run? And all because, forsooth, he had come on Judith

Arkroyd walking in a garden ! Surely all the circumstances were vociferous enough of detachment and independence, for both, to make a start and a quickened pulse enormously illogical. Why will emotions never be logical ?

One thing is certain, that he did all but turn and slip quietly away. He accounted to the upper stratum of his consciousness for this by referring it to a strong desire to be alone and "think over things." But he had to ignore a mind-flash that had crossed its lower stratum—one the story should almost apologize for recording, as too improbable—a sudden image of his odious neighbour, John Eldridge ; which he knew, without hearing anything, had said : "You can't stand that, Master Titus—never do !—never do at all !" Again, this story is compelled to disclaim all responsibility for Challis's mental oddities. But they have to be recorded, for all that.

Perhaps that speech of Sibyl's, in the garden just now, had something to answer for. What had she been protesting against ? Not the stage ; that was all over and done with. Challis never detected his own absurdity in jumping to the conclusion that the protest must have related to himself ! What right had he to infer, from a tone of Judith's voice, that she spoke about him ?

He did not run, though he went near it. Self-contempt stepped in. What imbecile cowardice ! What a miserable fear that he would lose the whip-hand of a fool's passion he was not even prepared to admit the existence of ! He—Alfred Challis—who but half-an-hour ago had been moved to a puny heartache over that memory of the pearl and its wanderings and recovery ! And then, to stagger in a fraction of time all sane contemplation of past and present, came the clash between that memory and his moment of shame, a short while since, that "poor Kate's" place in his heart had so soon been filled by poor slow Marianne. His wife now !—how his brain reeled to think of it all ! There was that home of his, and the children, and Bob ; the thought of the boy as good as stung him. What should he—what could he—say to Bob hereafter, if . . . ?

## CHAPTER XXXI

THERE was a little fountain in the middle of the little garden, with a little *amorino* from the court of the Signoria at Florence to attend to the squirting. The moon was comparing the light she could make on its shower of drops with sparkles from the lady's dress who stood beside it. It was in no hurry to decide—might perhaps ask a tiny cloud, that was coming, to help. Once inside the garden Challis was committed to approaching its centre. There was—remember!—no official recognition of any change in the position of the two since Trout Bend.

"I came here to be alone, but you may come." Judith's words might well have made matters worse. But her tranquil, unconcerned, almost insolent beauty in the moonlight was fraught with a sense of self-command that more than counterbalanced them. It gave her hearer a sort of *rangé* feeling—determined his position—put him on his good behaviour. He could trust to her control of their interview, but all the same a little resented feeling so much like a child in her hands.

"I came here to be alone, too," said he.

"Perhaps I ought to go?" Manifestly not spoken seriously, but not jestingly enough to set *badinage* afoot. She did not wait for his answer, but went on, "Perhaps we both ought, for that matter. Did you find the politics bored you? . . . oh!—metaphysics, was it? I came here because I found my little sister unendurable."

Challis thrust what he had overheard, when eaves-dropping, into the background of his mind: "About the stage, I suppose? Why do you not tell her—set her mind at ease?" But he knew Sibyl knew already, and this was only to help him to keep his foreground clear.

Judith appeared to select her answer at leisure, from

among reserves. "Sibyl knows," she said. "The indictment related to something else this time." Then, as though she were weighing a possibility: "No—I suppose I could hardly tell you about that. One is too artificial. We should be much nicer if we were small children. Never mind! Some day, perhaps!"

Challis decided on saying, with a laugh, "I suppose I mustn't be inquisitive and ask questions," as the best way of suggesting that his own guesses, if any, were trivial and impersonal. She ended a silence in which he fancied the subject was to be forgotten by saying: "I should tell you nothing, whatever you asked. Besides, you have never had a little sister, and would not understand. Family relations are mysteries."

"No, I have never had a little sister." And then Challis felt like a liar, and heart-sick as he thought of the thoroughness with which he had accepted Kate's "little sister" as his own. What a compensation he had thought her for a mother-in-law his most gruesome anticipations had not bargained for! When did the change come about?—when?—when? Why need the memory of it all come on him now, of all times? But Judith stopped his retrospect short with: "Get me that rose-bud, if you have a knife. Don't scratch yourself on my account." For Challis to reply: "What care I how much I scratch myself, if it is on your account?" would have savoured of Chitland, musically audible afar. Challis left it unsaid.

The rose-bud was soon got with the aid of a little tortoiseshell knife that was really Marianne's. There was another twinge in ambush for her husband over that, and a sharp cross-fire between it and the soul-brush, that was being kept at work all this while—unconsciously, one hopes; but this story knows exactly what Charlotte Eldridge would have thought and said. And she might have been right, for it makes little pretence of being able to see behind the veil this Judith's beauty hides her inner soul with, nor to read her heart. All it, the story, has known of her so far has been that beauty and her love of power. A perilous quality, that!

All it can say now is that if this woman knows, as she bends, careless how close, to take the flower from the hand

that gathered it ; as she flashes the diamonds on her white fingers quite needlessly near his lips—if she has any insight, as she does this, into the way she is playing with a human soul, then is she a thoroughly bad woman. And to our thinking all the worse if she knows, or believes, her reputation is safe in her own keeping. For then what is she, at best, but a keen sportswoman wicked enough to poach on her fellow-woman's preserves, destroying the peace of a home merely to show what a crack shot she is. We must confess to a preference for the standard forms of honourable, straightforward lawlessness. But perhaps these reflections are doing injustice to Judith. She may be capable of good, honest, downright wickedness. Remember that she is comparatively young and inexperienced.

One should surely beware, too, of doing injustice to beautiful women—ascribing to them motives of overt fascination, to entangle man, in every simple action a discreet dowdy might practise unnoticed and unblamed. Make an image of such a one in your mind—make it rosy, bony, obliging, with unwarrantable knuckles—let it place a flower in its bosom, if any ; and then say whether Charlotte Eldridge's keenest analysis could detect in its action the smallest element she could pounce on as seductive ; the slightest appearance of a hook baited to captivate her John, or anybody else's ? No, no !—let us be charitable, and suppose, for the present, at any rate, that Judith was unconscious in this flower incident of every trace of guile—merely *wanted* the flower, in fact, and asked Challis to get it, rather than risk her "Princess" skirts in the thorns which would have made shoddy of them in no time.

There are those, we believe, who hold that all the fascination of woman is due to adjuncts ; that the thrill of enchantment that "goes with" a woman's coiffures and well-cut skirts—especially the latter—would not survive seeing their owner, or kernel, run across a ploughed field in skin-tights—for we assume that the Lord Chamberlain would allow no more crucial experiment. It may be they are right. High Art teaches us the truth of the converse proposition. For that dragged-tailed, ill-hooked, ill-eyed, ill-buttoned thing with a bad cold and a shock of tow on



its head, that is emerging from a damp omnibus to the relief of its next-door neighbour, is going, please—when it has got rid of some raiment which would certainly go to the wash with advantage—is going to sit for *Aphrodite*, of all persons in the world; for that very goddess and no other!—for her the light of whose eyelids and hair in the uttermost ends of the sea none shall declare or discern. . . .

There!—it's no use talking about it, and stopping the story. Besides, Miss Arkroyd "had on" her "Princess" dress aforesaid, a strange witchery of infinitely flexible woven texture, snake-scaled and gem-fraught without loss of a fold, rustling and glittering till none could say which was rustle and which was glitter. And it all seemed a running comment on its owner—its pith and marrow, as it were!—a mysterious outward record of her inner self. Where is the gain of trying to guess how much was shell and how much was self? Enough that few women would have looked as lovely as she did, then and there.

For all this speculation—let the story confess it—is due simply to the excessive beauty the moonbeams made the most of, as its owner's eyes dropped on the flower her fingers were adjusting, to make sure it was exactly in the right place, and to engineer stray thorn-points that else might scratch. As for what is really passing in her heart, the story washes its hands of it.

"Marianne refuses again, of course," said she, when the rose was happily settled—or sadly, as it must have felt the parting from its stem.

"Again, of course!" said he. "But . . .!"

"But how did I know, you mean? Why, you would have told me at once if she had been coming."

"Not necessarily. I might have hoped for a second letter, to say she had changed her mind. It is no pleasure to me that she refuses."

"It might be to some husbands. But you are an affectionate husband. Do tell me something."

"Anything!" His emphasis on this was a satisfaction to him. It was like a very small instalment of what he had no right to say, or even to think; but, uttered in an ambush of possible other meanings, it franked the speaker of any particular one among them.

"If I were to ask to see her letter, should you be offended?"

He knew he could not answer, "Nothing you do can possibly give me offence," in the tone of empty compliment that would have made it safe. He gave up the idea, and said, with reality in his voice: "I should not show it to you."

"I like you when you speak like that," said Judith.

He felt a little apologetic. "After all," he said, "it's only tit-for-tat. You wouldn't tell me what Sibyl said."

"I am not offended," said Judith. A certain sense of rich amusement in her voice made these words read: "I take no offence at your male caprices. I know your ways. You are forgiven." But aloud her speech was, with a concession to seriousness: "I cannot well repeat what Sibyl said. But do not think of showing me Marianne's letter if you wish not to do so. It is not idle curiosity that made me ask to see it. I had a motive—perhaps not a wise one—but I think..."

"What?"

"I think you would forgive it." The suggestion certainly was that the speaker would see some way of influencing Marianne—making her drop her absurd obstinacy. No other motive was possible, thought Challis.

After all, what was there in the text of the letter that it would be a hanging matter for Judith to read? She, from her higher standpoint—for Challis believed in her, you see?—could forgive, overlook, understand a scrap or two of rudeness, a misspelt word or so. Why should he not show the letter, and have done with it?

"It is in your pocket, you know!" Judith was certainly *clairvoyante*, and Challis said so. "*Clairvoyante* enough to see you put it in your pocket as you came into the drawing-room!" said she, laughing.

Why this context of circumstances should make Challis plead illegibility by moonlight as a reason for not producing the letter he could not have said for the life of him. It was a weak plea; because, when Judith "pointed out" that so inveterate a smoker probably had wax vestas in his pocket, it seemed to leave him no line of defence to fall back upon. He produced the letter, and to our thinking was guilty of a breach of faith to Marianne in allowing

Judith to take it from him. At least, he should only have read to her what related to the invitation.

The first wax vesta blew out, and the second. "Hold it inside this," said Judith, making a shelter for the third with a gauzy thing of Japanese origin she really had no need for, the night was so warm. "You must hold it steadier than that," she added. "If this caught, it would blaze up." She was holding the open letter herself, with perfect steadiness.

"This is the last vesta," said Challis. "So you must read quick. Look sharp!" It was the fifth match, and the flame was nearing his fingers.

"Half-a-second more!" said Judith. She had turned the letter over. There was writing on the back that Challis had missed. He tried to read it now, over the shoulder that was so white in the moonlight, and failed. For the flame touched his fingers, and burned him.

Man is absolutely powerless against the sudden touch of fire. Remember Uncle Bob and the knife! Challis *had* to *les ve go, nolens volens*. The burning remnant of the wax fell on the gauzy scarf, which caught instantly. The moment was critical. But Challis showed a presence of mind beyond what one is apt to credit neurotic literary men with—mere mattoids, after all! Instead of trying to beat the flame out, or waiting to get his coat off to smother it, he tore the scarf sharply away from its wearer, who, happily, had the nerve to release a safety-pin in time to get it clear.

"Are you burned?" His voice seemed out of keeping with the resolution of his action.

"Very little, if at all. Just a touch, on this shoulder. Nothing really—but I am afraid your hands..."

"Oh no!—they're all right. Stop a bit!—what's that?" It was Marianne's letter, half-burned, and still burning. The unextinguished scarf it had fallen to the ground with had got through its combustion briskly. Challis was only just in time to save half the letter; and it was not the half he wanted.

"I dare say it doesn't matter," said he to Judith; "but there was something I hadn't read on the back. What you were reading when the match gave out."

"Yes—I think there was. A postscript. I didn't make it out. Shall we go in, or over on the lawn, where they are dancing?" She added a moment later: "I don't know why I am taking it for granted that you don't dance."

"I certainly don't; nowadays, at least. But you do, of course. The lawn by all means!" They passed through the little *porticino*, and complied with the understanding it had entered into. As Challis was turning the key, he paused an instant to look round at Judith and say: "Are you sure you can't remember anything of what was written on the back of the letter?" And she replied without hesitation: "Not a word. I had no time." Then he said: "I wish you could remember only just one word or two, to show what it was about." She answered: "But I can't. I am sorry. We must hope it was of no importance."

They walked side by side, without speaking, to the end of the last yew-hedged terrace, just on the open garden. Then, inexplicably, they turned and went back along the path. When they arrived again at the little gate in the wall, Challis suddenly faced his companion. He looked white and almost handsome in the moonlight—or so she may have thought, easily enough—for his eyes had a large, frightened look, that became them and the thoughtful thinness of their bone-marked setting. He spoke quite suddenly, keeping his voice under, with quick speech that showed its tension.

"Judith—Judith Arkroyd! It is no use. I can bear it no longer. I must leave you. It would have been well for me if I had done so earlier. It would have been best for me if I had never seen you." He turned from her, almost as though he shrank from the sight of her, and leaned against the grey stone angle of the little doorway, his face hidden in his arms. Had the woman who watched him—shame if it were so!—a feeling akin to triumph, as she saw how his visible hand caught and clenched and trembled in the moonlight? It may have been so. The story has no plummet to take soundings of her heart.

Her mere words may have meant fear lest she had overplayed her part—no more! "Oh, Scroop, you cannot blame me." But the way she too leaned, as for support in dizziness, on the edge of a great Italian garden-pot,

raised on a pedestal at the path-corner, and pressed her hand to her side as though her breath might catch the less for it—these things seemed to belong to more than the alarm of a sudden start.

He turned, with some recovery of self-possession, as one who shakes free of any unmanliness. "Blame *you*, Judith!" he cried, calling her freely by her name—a thing he had never yet done. "Not I, God knows! I am all self-indictment, if ever man was. And this, look you, is my offence: that I, knowing myself as I am, knowing what I owe to my wife, to my children—they are dear to me still, I tell you, believe it who may!—that *I* have allowed the image and presence of *you*, Judith Arkroyd, to take such possession of me, my mind, my whole soul, that you are never absent from me. And the bondage that is on me is one I cannot see the end of. All I know is that I am powerless against it. It may be—it *may* be—that the memory of you will die out and leave me—that when I see you no longer, your voice and your beauty will become things of the past, and be forgotten. When we have parted, as we must, Heaven grant me this oblivion! But I cannot conceive it now."

He paused, and as he wiped the drops from his brow, seemed to hark back a little to his daily self, saying in a quick undertone: "It is a good world to forget in. Precedents are in favour of it. There is that to be said."

The little change in his manner made her find her voice. "Yes!" she said. "I see how it is. You must go. I shall always grieve that I could not keep your friendship... yes—you see my meaning? I *have* valued it. But this kind of thing is the misfortune of some women. It is a bitter thing—we must part in a few hours, so I may speak plainly—a bitter thing to be forced to lose a friend one loves as a friend, merely because one chances to be a woman."

If only this interview might have ended here! If only Mr. Ramsay Tomes and Mr. Brownrigg could have come on the scene now, instead of five minutes later! But there never was good came of last words, from the world's beginning.

The unhappy, storm-tossed man and his tormentor—for that was what Judith was, meaningly or without intent

—turned to go back towards the noisy world. Half-way, as though she would use the silence and darkness of the alley they were passing through for the freedom of speech such surroundings give, Judith spoke again. If Charlotte Eldridge had been there, her interpretation of Judith certainly would have been: "*She doesn't mean to let him go—not she!*" Would it have been a fair one?

Possibly. But all Judith said was: "I am afraid I am a woman without a heart."

Challis said interrogatively: "Because . . . ?" and waited.

"Because I find myself only thinking of what *I* shall lose when you go. If I were *good*, Scroop"—a slight sneer here—"I should have a little thought for you. I suppose I'm bad. Very well!"

"I am taking no credit to myself for any sort of altruism in my—my feelings towards yourself." Challis shied off from the use of the word "love"; but whether because it would have rung presumptuously without the sanction of its object, or because of the bald rapidity of its use on the stage, where Time is of the essence of the contract, he might have found it hard to say.

"I should not thank you for it. Nor any woman. But many a woman who injures a friend unawares—being unselfish and pious and so on—would gladly . . ." She hesitated.

"Put a salve to the wound!"

"Well—yes—that sort of thing! But I am afraid I am rather brutal about it. Can you not, after all, forget this foolish infatuation for my sake? Consider the wild words you spoke just now unsaid, and give me back my friend. Come, Scroop!" Her beautiful eyes were surely full of honest appeal—no *arrière pensée* Mrs. Eldridge would have damned her for—as she went frankly close to him and laid her hand on his.

He shrank from her—absolutely shrank!—and gasped as though her touch took his breath away. He found no words, and she had not finished.

"Think—oh, think!—what rights could I ever have in you? Think of your wife. . . ."

"I do think of her—oh, I do think! But it makes me mad."

"Go back to her and forget me then, if it must be so. Remember this, Scroop—that the bond that holds you to her is thrice as strong as it would be if . . ."

"If what?"

"Well!—I must say it. If it were a legal one. . . ."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean you are not married to her—there!"

"Oh, the Deceased Wife's Sister rubbish?"

"Yes." And then Challis thought to himself, through the fog of all his soul-torture and perplexity, "How comes she to be so ready to go home to the mark? We have never talked beyond the bare fact that Marianne and Kate were sisters." But he let the thought go by, to make way for another of greater weight with him.

"You never can mean," he cried—"you—you—you never can mean that I——" She interrupted him with the self-command that seemed to belong to her—to grow upon her, if anything—and completed his speech for him: "That you would take advantage of a legal shuffle to evade a promise given in honour? Of course, I mean the exact reverse. I mean that you, of all men, would hold yourself three times bound to an illegal contract."

"All men would, worth the name of men. Debts Law disallows are debts of honour. But all that is nothing. I love my wife. I tell you I love my wife; I will not have it otherwise." His voice was almost angry, as against some counter-speech. But he dropped it in a kind of exhaustion, with a subdued half-moan. "What have I to do," said he wearily, "with all these wretched nostrums of legislation and religion, that would dictate the terms of Love? Mine have come to me, and my soul is wrenched asunder. Surely the penalty is enough to make beadledom superfluous. No man who knows what Love means will ever love two women. . . . There—that's enough!" He stopped abruptly, as cutting something needless short. She spoke:

"It comes to good-bye, then?"

"Yes—unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"You will say I am strange."

"You are. But you cannot change yourself. Speak plainly!"

"Listen, Judith! If you can look me in the face and say you have no love for me—you know the sense I use the word in as well as I—then I will pack away a sorrow in my heart till it dies; and the time will come when you shall say: 'That man is my good friend, but he declared a fool's passion to me once, for all that, and now he seems to have forgotten it.' It shall be so. But, better still, and easier for me, if you could say with truth that there was some other man elsewhere whose hand in yours would be more welcome than mine; whose voice, whose look, whose lips would be a dearer memory. If you could tell me this, the fool's passion would at least be all the shorter lived." He stopped as they reached the end of the sheltered path, and looked her full in the face. He had stopped, as it were, on a keynote of self-ridicule—the habit was inveterate—and he was one of those men who are at their best when individuality comes out strongest.

She had never looked so beautiful in his eyes as when she stood there, silent in the moonlight, weighing to all appearance the answer she should make. Perhaps she knew how beautiful—who can say? She remained motionless through a long pause—through the whole of a nightingale's song in the thicket hard by. Then her bosom heaved—a long breath—and then, with a sort of movement of surrender of her hands—how the diamonds flashed!—she said, "I cannot," and then again, "No—I cannot." Then, in a more measured and controlled voice: "This means that we must part—now! I shall not see you to-morrow."

"Strangers and foes do sunder and not kiss," said Helena to Bertram. But how about those who are neither foes nor strangers, yet must be more than friends, and dare not be lovers? An interview of this sort had best not end in an embrace, if two victims of infatuation are to be saved from themselves. Let the description remain for Judith as well as Challis. But she had the self-command to check his impulse, throwing out her jewelled hands against it, and crying—not loudly, but beneath her breath: "No—no—no! Remember what we are—what we must be. For Heaven's sake, no madness!" And then, as he let fall his hands and their intention, but with all his hunger



on him, and the foreknowledge of sleepless hours to come, she turned towards the voices that were approaching them from the house.

"I cannot recall"—it was Mr. Tomes who couldn't—"any occasion on which a discussion of so abstruse, and I may say elusive, a topic has been conducted with more philosophical insight, and a stronger sense of what I need not scruple to term the argumentative *meum* and *tuum*. Neither am I prepared to admit what possibly inexperience in debate may be eager to affirm, that the ratiocinative perspicuity of a post-prandial collective intelligence has been fruitless in result. I may point with satisfaction to at least two conclusions—the impossibility of drawing safe inferences in discussions where the same word is used in several different senses, and the uselessness of the attempt to define the meaning of words until we are agreed upon the nature, and, I may add, the legitimate limits, of Definition." Mr. Tomes paused. He was a little disconcerted at the discovery that he was being intelligible by accident, and also he had caught sight of Challis and Miss Arkroyd. His abrupt full-stop as he met them was unwelcome to this former, who would have had the orator continue, to hide his own perturbation. But it did not matter, for Judith was more than equal to the occasion.

"I have narrowly escaped being burned alive, Mr. Tomes. Mr. Challis set fire to me lighting his cigar. However, he put me out." Nothing could exceed her easy grace and perfect self-possession.

Very fortunately Mr. Wraxall, the Universal Insurer, was one of Mr. Tomes's companions. The opportunity was a splendid one, and he seized upon it. Challis got away in a most dastardly manner, leaving Judith exposed to risks and averages and premiums beyond the wildest dreams of Negotiation run mad. As a matter of fact, Mr. Wraxall must have been welcome enough. When life jars, let others do the volubility, and spare us!

The dispersal of guests and the family at the foot of the great staircase was to-night more tumultuous than usual. Not only was the house-party at its maximum—its noisy

maximum!—but many outsiders from the neighbourhood were among the dancers. Challis noticed, though whether as cause or consequence he never inquired, four more young soldiers, who, he understood, had come from as far off as it would take a blood mare in a dog-cart, that just held them and no room to spare, an hour and fifty minutes to trot back to, over a good road. These youths were in such tremendous spirits that when the last farewells of the dog-cart died away on the offing, a sort of holy hush seemed to ensue, and people drew long breaths, and smiled excusefully—for young folk are young, folk, you know—and said now we could hear ourselves speak. Why was it that Challis, not unobservant, for all his own hidden fever, pictured the occupants of the dog-cart, beyond the offing, as speaking little now, each dwelling on his own private affairs? Was it because four corresponding chits, at least, had hushed down and become self-absorbed and absent? And where was the relevance of measles, and Challis's thought to himself that it was best to have them young?

The Rector was there, too. He had not been a dancer, but had refrained merely because, in view of this great accession of force from Jack's and Arthur's friends from the garrison, no further male dancers were wanted. When Challis reached the house, after prolonging a voluntary ostracism in the garden-silences until he heard the guests dispersing, and saw Chinese lanterns being suppressed, he found Athelstan Taylor just on the point of taking leave. He was explaining to her ladyship why he had not come to dinner—for it seemed he had been invited—when she stopped him with a question about one of the children who came into his explanation. His reply was: "Oh yes!—just a bad inflammatory cold. But she'll be all right in a day or two. Only we shall have to be careful. Good-night, Lady Arkroyd!"

"I think it is good-morrow, is it not?" said Challis, quoting. "Is Charles's Wain over the new chimney, I wonder? Perhaps, Rector, you know which Charles's Wain is? I don't. I always confuse between him and Orion."

"You'll have a hard job to do so now. Why, my dear fellow, can't you remember how we talked of Orion last Autumn, and he was hardly visible even then?"

"I remember—in your garden. You must show him to me again some day!" The Rector looked attentively at the speaker. He had caught the minor key in his voice; it had crept in alongside of a misgiving. "I shall lose this friend I would so gladly keep, cloth or no!"

"All right! But you mustn't stop away till Orion comes. When shall I tell my sister to lay a place for you? I believe we are clear next Thursday—will that do?" He took out a note-book for an entry.

"I'm sorry," said Challis. "But I'm obliged—I was just going to tell Lady Arkroyd—I am obliged to return to town to-morrow. I had a letter to-day, calling me back on business. It's a case of compulsion—oh no!—nothing wrong. A mere matter of business relating to publication!"

Her ladyship's sorrow at losing her distinguished guest knew no bounds. She must look forward to seeing him in town, where the family would return in a fortnight. But Mr. Challis would stay over to-morrow. No!—Mr. Challis couldn't do any such thing, thank you! He ought to go by the early train—was sorry to give trouble—but if he and his box could be taken to the railway early enough... Oh no!—~~he~~ didn't mind breakfast at 6.30, only it was the trouble! But as Lady Arkroyd's heart was rejoicing—hostesses' hearts do—at her guest getting clear of the mansion before she was out of bed, she was able, from gratitude, to make her grief at his departing at all almost a reality. Otherwise she was consciously relieved that he should go; but as for any mental discomfort on the score of her daughter's relations with him—the idea!—a middle-aged, married, professional man! The eleventh century to the rescue!

Athelstan Taylor said "Good-bye, then!" with real regret, especially as there was something wrong, manifestly. His first instinct was to forswear driving back with Miss Caldecott to the Rectory, and to persuade Challis to walk "part of the way" with him. But—breakfast at 6.30, and Charles's Wain over the new chimney, or its equivalent! After all, he was human. Only, what a pity! A talk with him might have meant so much to Challis.

Sibyl's regrets merely meant, "See how well-bred I am, to be able to conceal my rejoicing! Go away, and don't call in Grosvenor Square when I'm there! Do not give my kind regards to your wife, though a worthy woman, no doubt!" That is, if Challis translated an overflow of suave speech rightly.

Other *adieux* followed, genuine enough. Mr. Brownrigg was honestly sorry to lose the opportunity of showing Mr. Challis those extracts from Graubosch. Mr. Wraxall was seriously concerned at not being able to supply the figures necessary to a complete understanding of Differential Equivalents, a system by which all deficits would be counteracted. Mr. Ramsay Tomes said he should always regard with peculiar satisfaction the opportunities for shaking the hand of an author of whom he had always predicted a very large number of remarkable things, "considering"—thought his author—"that he does not appear to have read any of my immortal works." The Baronet himself seemed to be developing a scheme for correlating Feudalism with everything else, in connection with his regret that Mr. Challis had to go away next morning, until her ladyship reminded him that Mr. Challis had to go to bed. So at last Mr. Challis went.

Sibyl hung back. Judith had not gone up yet, she said, in answer to her mother's "I suppose you do mean to go to bed, child, some time!" Why, then, couldn't she leave Judith till breakfast to-morrow? But her ladyship stopped short of pushing for an answer, for she mixed "Good-night" with a yawn, and got away upstairs.

Mr. Elphinstone testified discreetly that he could hear Miss Arkroyd coming. Yes—there she was! Who was that with her? Only the young girl, Tilley, miss! This was what the name Cintilla had become, naturally, in the mouths of the household.

"Go up, child, and see that my hot water isn't cold. Cold hot water is detestable.... Yes, Sibyl?" This was in answer to a particular method of saying nothing, containing an intention to say something disagreeable presently.

"I didn't say anything."

"Please don't be tiresome. You know what I mean, quite well. What was it you didn't say?"

"I suppose you know Mr. Challis is going away to-morrow?"

Judith's demeanour is exemplary. Something pre-engages her. Mr. Challis must come after. She calls the little ex-dairymaiden back; and then, turning to Mr. Elphinstone, waiting patiently to be the last to retire, says to him, "What is good for a burn, Elphinstone?"—as to a universal referee. He replies, "I always use olive-oil, miss," as if he belonged to a particular school of singed butlers. "Give the child some for me," says Judith; and then, being free to give attention to her sister, goes on with, "Yes, what is it? Oh yes! Do I know Mr. Challis is going away to-morrow? Of course I know Mr. Challis is going away to-morrow."

"I thought you did," says Sibyl. This is hardly consecutive, but Judith's equanimity is impregnable. No impertinences or aggressions are to affect it, that's clear! She is easily able to compare the watch on her wrist with the hall-clock, and to find their testimony is the same, for all their difference of size, before she makes further answer.

"Mr. Challis is called away by business. So he says. . . . Good-night!" Cintilla, or Tilley, will bring the magic oil; so Judith goes upstairs leisurely. Her sister follows. But she has not said good-night yet.

Telepathy makes very funny terms, sometimes, between sisters. And a fact ignored, that has called for comment, may broach a reciprocal consciousness that will never be at rest without speech in the end. This time it is that burn, which Sibyl has said nothing about—has asked no explanation of. And both know it.

At the stair-top both sisters say good-night, with a sort of decision that seems overloaded for the occasion. But the valediction seems inoperative; as both wait, for no apparent reason. Then Sibyl speaks in a quick undertone:

"You wouldn't listen to me, Ju . . . No, you needn't be frightened—they're not coming yet. . . ." For Judith

had glanced back down the staircase. "You wouldn't listen, and now you see what has come of it."

"What *has* come of it?"

"Judith!—do you think I am blind, or do you take me for a fool?"

"Yes, dear—the last! But go on. I can wait any time, in reason, for an explanation." She embarked on a period of waiting, gracefully indulgent, a tranquil listener.

"Do you suppose I am taken in by this story?"

"What story?"

"This story of Mr. Challis's going home on business."

"It's a very simple story."

"Very simple . . . oh dear!—there's the girl. I'll tell you in the morning. . . ."

"I want to hear now. . . . Put it in my room, child, and go to bed." And Cintilla says, "Yes, miss!" and vanishes to an innocent pillow. "I want to hear now, and perhaps you'll be so kind as to tell me."

"Come into my room!"

"Certainly!" Judith complies without reserves, dropping gracefully into an armchair, after placing her candle in safety. She makes a parade of her waiting patience. Sibyl, all aflame with flashing eyes, turns on her after closing the door carefully.

"After what I have seen this evening, Judith, I know what to think. . . . No!—it's no use your denying it." Then in a lower voice, with the flush on her cheeks spreading to her temples, she adds: "Not an hour ago I saw that man Challis. . . ." She pauses on the edge of her indictment.

"You saw that man Challis . . .?"

"I saw that man Challis . . . yes!—I don't care, Judith . . . making love to you in Tophet, with his arm round your waist."

"And where were you?"

"Up here in this room. My hair came down, dancing. And I looked out of that window and *saw* you. Oh, Judith!"

"Oh, Sibyl!" Judith repeats mockingly. She goes to the window with easy deliberation. It is wide open on the summer night, for heat. "Of course one sees Tophet

from here," she says. "But how you could distinguish Mr. Chrillis's arm, or my waist, is a mystery to me, at this distance."

"Have I no eyesight, Judith? I tell you I saw it all, as I stood there where you are now. I saw him set fire to your scarf thing with his cigar. And his arm was round you, and he was looking over your shoulder. I saw it by the blaze-up, as plain as I see you now!"

Judith is undisturbed. "I see you have withdrawn my waist," she says. She circles her diamonded fingers round its girth, and seems not dissatisfied with the span they cannot cover. "But you've got the story wrong, little sister."

"Being offensive won't do you any good."

"You are my little sister, Sib dear! And you're a goose. Mr. Challis showed me a letter, and was kind enough to hold a lighted match for me to read it by."

Sibyl makes no reply. Her eyes remain fixed on her sister as she turns a bracelet on her arm uneasily. Evidently she only half believes her. Can she be lying? It is a matter on which a woman who has never lied before will lie freely. One who has flirted, at such close quarters, with another woman's husband, will tell her sister lies rather than admit it. Sibyl wishes, on the whole, that Judith would look her in the face as she speaks, instead of being so wrapped up in a landscape she knows by heart.

Judith seems inclined to get out of hearing of that subject—has had enough of it. "It seems a shame," she says, "to go to bed on such a heavenly night. But I suppose one must!"

Sibyl is not going to be fubbed off with any such evasions. She has made up her mind, this evening—this is in strict confidence—to accept a peer's son who will be a peer himself when his father ceases to be one, and she is keenly alive to the desirability of avoiding family scandals just at this crisis. If Judith is going to bring a slur on an honourable name, thinks Sibyl, let her do it after my coronet is landed. Her blood is up.

"What was there in the letter?" she says bluntly.

"Sibyl dear, really!" There is amusement in Judith's tone, as of forbearance towards juvenility.

Her sister mocks her. "Yes—*me* dear, really!" she says. "What was there in the letter?"

"May the catechism stop, if I tell you!" The yawn that begins in these words lasts into what follows: "Oh, no, I don't mind telling you, child! There was nothing to make a secret of. It was from his affectionate wife—poor fellow! He really deserves something less dowdy. Let me see, now, how did it run? Her dear Titus—that was it!—she had had another letter from me, pressing her to come. Hadn't written back. Would her dear Titus make me understand that she was too much wanted at home to come away just now? Besides, she did not care for society, as her dear Titus perfectly well knew. She would only be in the way if she did come. It was much better she should have her friends, and he his—spelt wrong: *is* instead of *ie*. Do you want to know all the rest of the important letter? Very well! She had spent yesterday evening with grandmamma at Pulse Hill, and dear Charlotte was just gone. He was not to hurry back on her account, as it was easier for—some name of a cook—when he was away. He had better stay as long as he could, where he was being amused and flattered. And she was his affectionate wife Marianne.... Have you been flattering Mr. Titus Seroop, Sibyl dear?"

Sibyl ignored the question. "Tulse Hill, I suppose," said she thoughtfully. "Who's dear Charlotte, I wonder?"

"A Mrs. Eldridge. Nobody you know!"

"I wonder if she's good for dear Marianne." Simple truth must now and then tax credulity, or be excluded from fiction. The whole of the conversation is given above, and where or when on earth Sibyl found in it anything to warrant this wonderment of hers Heaven only knows! However, one can wonder at nothing, oneself, in these days of Marconigraphs. Sibyl ended her speech with, "The woman's as jealous as she can be—one can see that!"

"Can one?... oh, I dare say one can, dear! Only she's no concern of mine. Suppose we go to bed."

"If you were Mr. Challis's wife, you might feel just as she does. And if you were not really his wife, it would be all the worse."



"Of course, when one's neither, one doesn't care." This was faulty in construction, yet neither sister felt that it could not be understood.

The hardships of a forgotten casual on the landing outside were recognised with, "Oh dear! Why didn't you go to bed? It's nearly two o'clock." And then sleep came in view, for those who were at home to him.

If Judith said, "Not at home," was it any wonder? Think what an amount of dissimulation she had gone through since that revelation of Challis's in the garden—since what may have been a discovery about her part of something she may have suspected before, but had half contemptuously dismissed! She may have even then once asked herself the question, "Do I possibly love this man?" and laughed a negative. But oh, the difference it makes when a man has said roundly, "I carry your image in my heart, and cannot be quit of it." She had played with edged tools, and had cut herself. The burn on her shoulder was not the only result of tampering with fire that day, for her. Most surely for her own sake, and his, concealment was the sacramental word, for the moment. She had let him know she was unable to say she did not love him; that was all! But an intent she had half formed in the very core of her heart must be hidden from him. He must have no suspicion that she would lend herself to a scheme that would take advantage of a wretched legal shuffle—one of the most wretched that Themis has ever scheduled as a shift for the cancelling of a solemn contract. Was she quite prepared to say she would not, for her own sake, jump at an expedient granted by the solemnity of Law, to make Dishonour seem honourable, and disallow the claims of this stupid, commonplace, would-be wife, who was no wife at all? And who knew it, for that matter.

For this intention had sounded its first note in her heart as she read that postscript, when the last match was all but burned out. She could remember every word of it, as she paced to and fro in the silence of her bedroom, fostering the idea it suggested. "I suppose you know"—so poor fool Marianne had written, in her momentary fit of spleen and obduracy—"what mamma always says about

you and me—that we are not really married at all. If so, I ought to go back and live with her, and the sooner the better. Then you would be free, and I suppose it would be Judith.” For what was what the stupid, exasperated woman had actually written, and next morning would have been so glad to plunder the postman’s bag of, when he disembowelled the vermilion pillar-box at the corner.

But, as for Judith, her business was to bury the suggestion—which she had read, and Challis had not—in her heart. Had she not a right to hide her cloven foot, if it was one—to wear over it a pretext of her reverence for the bond that linked this man to his dowdy wife, until it broke asunder from its natural rottenness? What was that nauseous saying male man was so fond of? “All’s fair in Love!” and what the fetid interpretations he felt no shame to put upon it? Why was all the selfishness and meanness to belong to one sex alone?

And meanwhile Challis himself was tossing through the fever of a sleepless night, until some wretched sleep was broken by Samuel calling him at 6.30 in the morning, and the hoot of a motor outside. Samuel explained that he had come later than the first time fixed, as his lordship had placed the Panhard at Mr. Challis’s disposal, and it would more than make up the time. Challis was grateful.

## CHAPTER XXXII

LIZARANN was, of course, the patient Mr. Taylor spoke of. But it was all her own fault, said Public Opinion, that she had such a bad inflammatory cold. If she and Joan had been good, obedient children, and done as they were told when they came home from the tea-party at Royd, instead of giving Aunt Bessy the slip and running away to Daddy at Mrs. Forks's cottage, all would have been well. But be lenient to Lizarann! It was all through her anxiety that old Christopher should have his bicarbonate of soda. Her anxiety on his behalf was great, although she did not know him personally.

"Maten't Phoebe and Jones go round to old Mrs. Forks, where Daddy is, and bring it screwed up in piper like acrost the road to Mr. Curtis's?" So Lizarann had said—for she really believed that Joan's name was one and the same with that of the Wash, in Cazenove Street—and Aunt Bessy's negative had been emphatic.

"Certainly *not*, my dear! At this time of the evening! Why, it's past six o'clock. . . . Yes, you and Joan may run on in front, only don't get over the gate till I come. The gate of the next field, you know." But when Aunt Bessy and Phoebe reached that gate—where were Lizarann and Joan! The wicked imps had gone to Mrs. Forks's.

The worst of it was that when the Rector had personally recaptured the truants, and was taking them home, a motor-car, with a lady and gentleman in it, passed them, going at speed. That, as they escaped alive, was no harm. But, having passed, it stopped, and something disagreed with it all through the colloquy that followed.

"Isn't that Mr. Taylor? Can't we give you a lift?"

"You're going the wrong way. And we're too numerous."

"Nonsense! Any amount of room! And it won't

take us three minutes to run you back to the Rectory. Jump in."

The Rector hesitated a moment. It was just on to dinner-time at the Hall, and it seemed a shame to make this lady and gentleman late. But Lizarann was coughing again. It may have been the petrol, but still——! Then, too, Aunt Bessy's anxiety would be over all the sooner. And there were those children almost frantic with delight at the idea of a ride in a motor!

So he agreed. And it *was* fun! Only there were two drawbacks—one, that it was over so soon; the other, that no sooner were they deposited at the Rectory gate, and the lady and gentleman in the motor off at great speed to be in time for dinner, than Lizarann had such a terrible attack of coughing that Miss Caldecott and her brother-in-law were quite alarmed.

The report the Rector gave to Lady Arkroyd was too sanguine. Bad inflammatory colds don't yield to treatment in a couple of hours, which was about how long it had been at work by the time he and Aunt Bessy drove away to the Hall, to come in after dinner, having been forced to cry off, with apology and explanation, owing to the escapade of the children.

Lizarann's didn't yield to treatment for many days, and during that period was a serious source of alarm to all her circle of friends at the Rectory, and a frequent subject of enquiry by interested outsiders. For the little maid had a happy faculty of remaining in the memory of chance acquaintances. Also, it was generally understood in the neighbourhood that she was a delicate *protégée* of the Rector's friend's sister, Adeline Fossett, and had been sent away from town to get the benefit of the air at Royd. So Lizarann got quite her fair share of public interest.

But her attack must have been a sharp one, or we may rely upon it she wouldn't have been kept in bed next day, and more days after next day. And Dr. Sidrophel—it wasn't his real name, mind you!—wouldn't have said, as he did till Lizarann really felt quite sick of hearing it, that it would be as well to continue the poultices, for the present, as a precaution. Her own view, to be sure, was that inflammation was the result of mustard poultices and stetho-

scopes primarily, and that it was bound to get worse if you had to put a glass tube in your mouth at the bidding of well-meaning friends. But she concealed these convictions in deference to public opinion, and did everything she was told to do, however gross the infatuation might be that instituted the obnoxious treatment. Her conviction that she had, intrinsically, nothing the matter with her was, however, not one to be shaken lightly. She went so far once as to say so to Dr. Pordage—that *was* his real name!—who replied, "Oh ah, that's it, is it? Nothing the matter! But you *will* have, if you don't look alive, as safe as a button! So there we are, little miss!"—but absently, as though she was a child and wouldn't understand him—and blatted the prescription he had been writing. But Lizarann heard every word, and resolved to look alive, so far as in her lay, whenever an opportunity came. Meanwhile, none being manifest, she reflected a good deal on buttons, wondering what was the nature of the security they tendered, and why she had never heard of it before.

When Mr. Yorick—the name she preferred for the Rector, because, you see, Miss Fossett must know best—came to pay her a visit shortly after, she inquired on this point, giving the whole of the doctor's speech, and making herself cough. Now, Mr. Yorick always talked to Lizarann as if she was a sensible person; and if there was one attribute for which the child loved him more dearly than another, it was that. But her devotion to him was so complete—second only to her love for her Daddy—that analysis of it was absurd.

"Was he talking to you, or talking to himself, Lizarann?" said he, sitting by the bed with the patient's hand in his. It was small and feverish.

The reply called for reflection. Having thought well over it, Lizarann said decisively: "Bofe!"

"Was he writing all the while?"

"Yass!" Nods helped the emphasis. "All the while! Scritch-scratch!"

"That was it, Lizarann! Dr. Sidrophel can't write and hear what he says to himself at the same time. So nobody knows what he means." But the little woman's great eyes were full of doubtful inquiry, and more must

he said. "I expect he only meant that if you went out in the air you would get your cough back. So you must just look alive and lie in bed." It was plausible, and would have to do for the present. The button question might stand over.

"Mustn't I go and see Daddy where Mrs. Forks is?"

"Yes, in a little while. Daddy will come and see you every day."

"And bring his crutches to come upstairs with?"

"Daddy left his crutches here yesterday. To be ready for him whenever he comes."

"And not tear a hole in the drugget?"

"Not if he goes gently and I put my hand on his back!"

"Which hand?"

"This one I've got hold of you with, Miss Coupland! Any more questions?"

Lizarann pursed up her lips and shook her head. But she reconsidered her decision. "Yass! About Dr. Side—Dr. Side..."

"Dr. Sidrophel? What about him?"

"Why's his real nime Pordage?" She had the name very pat, showing close observation and reflection.

Mr. Yorick had to consider the point. "Well!" said he presently, "I admit it's rather a bad job. But there's no way out of it now. It is his real name, and that's all about it!" But Lizarann looked dissatisfied. "We may call him Dr. Sidrophel behind his back, Lizarann," added he.

"Supposing he was to hear us talking behind his back, and was to listen behind his back..." Hypothetical knavery being admitted between these two, as a necessity in ingenious fictions, Mr. Yorick did not think a homily on truth-telling necessary at this point. In fact, he counselled bold duplicity, to Lizarann's great relief. "We should have to go far enough off, Lizarann," said he. And the stage direction indicated was so pleasant to her unfledged mind that she utilised it to develop the subject further—kept the curtain up, as it were!

"Then if we wentited far enough off, you could tell me why his nime was Dr. Spiderophel, too." She dashed intrepidly at the name, and nearly captured it.

"Of course I could, and he wouldn't hear one word."

"And what should you say?" Lizarann gave a slight leap in bed, from pleasant anticipation. She was told to lie quiet, and she should hear.

And that is how it was that when Miss Caldecott came in, dressed *cap-à-pie* for public worship, a prayer-book in a gloved hand—for it was Sunday morning—to remind her brother-in-law that the bells were going to begin, and arouse him to his duties, she found him telling how Sidrophel was an astronomer who took a fly in his telescope for an elephant on the moon; and that this legend was only partly cleared up by its narrator. Telescopes and stethoscopes remained imperfectly differentiated in Lizarann's mind. And Mr. Yorick's temporary acceptance of her pronunciation led to a misapprehension about spiders and flies. Did this astronomer catch that fly, or did the fly get away? Lizarann treasured hopes on its behalf, for the next chapter in the story.

But she felt it her duty to look alive, and lie quite quiet in bed, although—law bless you!—*she* had nothing the matter with her. So she lay and watched a greedy bee, who seemed bent on leaving no honey in that jessamine, at any rate, that came across the open lattice, and had its say in the mixed scents of hay and roses that came in out of the sunshine for Lizarann to get her share of them. She lay and listened to the bells, and wondered why the sound rose and fell, and decided at first that it was done for the purpose, and was the right way. But then, how did Nonconformity afar manage to do it so exactly like? For the Chapel tinkle rose and fell, too. Then came the footsteps on the garden-gravel; one big one, the Rector's, and many small ones. And Lizarann was so sorry she wasn't to go to Church, where it was her Sunday-wont, in these days, to drive a coach-and-six through the first Commandment, and worship Athelstan Taylor on his pulpit-altar in a heart-felt way, while admitting official obligations elsewhere.

But she couldn't go this time, and, what was more, she had to go on looking alive and lying quiet while Phoebe and Joan shouted good-byes up at the window, as though they were off to New Zealand; because, you see, Lizarann

had solemnly promised, if they did so, not to shout back and make herself cough.

"She hardly coughed at all when I was with her," said the Rector, on his way to his weekly *pièces de résistance*—his Sunday sermon. "I can't help thinking Dr. Sidrophel may be making his fly out an elephant this time."

"Perhaps, dear! But the fly may become an elephant. He's really very clever, although you do make such game of him. You see, he was quite right about poor Gus."

"Ah, dear, dear!—yes. But then he says, if Gus got into a better climate, he might make old bones yet."

"So Gus will, by God's mercy, dear! But I mean, Dr. Pordage said—and I do not see that I am bound to call him out of his name—that in the end Gus would have to give in, and go. You see, he was right! Joan!"

"Yes, aunty darling!"

"Don't turn your toes in and out, and whistle. It's not at all lady-like, and there's Mrs. Theophilus Silvertown just behind in the pony-carriage." Joan toned her behaviour down to meet the prejudices of local society. "You *do* see, don't you, that Dr. Pordage *was* right?" For this good lady wouldn't *glisser*, and always *appuyait* until her accuracy had been entered on the minutes. Her brother-in-law said, "Quite right, aunty!" And she said, "Very well, then!" and seemed to find the fact that she was right almost a set-off against the painful fact she was right about.

For Dr. Sidrophel's shrewd forecast about the Rev. Augustus Fossett meant exile for that invalid; and this exile had already taken form in the proposal that Gus should accept a chaplaincy of an English church in Tunis, which had been offered to him. Athelstan Taylor was keen on his acceptance of the post; as he would have been on the amputation of his own right hand, if he had seen therein any benefit for his friend. But his face went very sad over it as he walked on in silence.

His mind was back in his old Eton and Oxford days, when they were all young together—Gus and his sister Adeline, and he, and the mother of those two youngsters in front, who were being so decorous, pending the approach of the pony-chariot behind. And this semi-sister of his



own, beside him now, who was always a sort of thorn in the Rector's innermost conscience. For hadn't she—or had she—foregone wedlock and babes of her own for the sake of her sister's and his? The sort of thing no one could ever really know! And what would happen if this confounded Deceased Wife's Sister Bill were to become law? That was the *cul-de-sac* these explorations often led him to, more and more as the chances increased of a majority for the Bill in the House of Peers. But it *was* a *cul-de-sac*. Why think about it? Was not each day's evil sufficient for it, and something over?

The pony-carriage gained and gained—overhauled the pedestrians—underwent a period of rapture that it should absolutely see them alive in the flesh—and forged ahead unfeelingly. But it had not expelled from the Rector's mind a something that it had met with in that *cul-de-sac*—what was it?—oh yes, he knew!

"That's a very sad business, I'm afraid, of poor Challis's."

But Miss Caldecott cannot honour this remark immediately. Deportment calls for attention. "You're not to begin again, the minute they're out of sight, Joan. . . . What business, dear?"

"I thought you knew about it?"

"No, I know nothing. Only what Lady Arkroyd said."

"Exactly! Well—it's a very painful affair."

"No doubt, dear! Phoebe, don't hunch your shoulders."

"Come, Bess, be a little sorry for the poor chap! I don't believe it's *his* fault."

"Oh, I dare say not! I know nothing about it. And I don't want to know anything about people of that sort."

"What sort?"

"You know what I mean, Athel. Literary, freethinking sort of people. Them and their wives!"

"I know quite well what you mean, Bess." As Athelstan does know, he says so honestly, instead of allowing his sister-in-law to attempt to explain her meaning, which he is well aware she cannot. "But tell me again what Lady Arkroyd said about Challis and his wife."

"Just what I told you."

"Which was . . . ?"

"That they had quarrelled, and she had gone away to her mother. The day after he went back."

"Was that all?"

"Yes—I think so! Yes, there was nothing else."

"How came Lady Arkroyd to know?"

The lady becomes suddenly explicit. "My dear, it's, no, use, your, catechizing me! For I tell you I know nothing about it! You must ask Lady Arkroyd yourself. There they are!" Meaning that carriage-wheels are audible, identifiable as the Hall coming to Church.

And then the Rector had to mind his *ps* and *qs*. For he hadn't so much as thought of the text he should preach on.

However, he acquitted himself well, as he had done a hundred times under analogous circumstances. And then, as soon as he felt at liberty to be secular, his mind went back to the profane author's domestic affairs.

"My dear Lady Arkroyd, what's this about our friend Challis and his wife?"

The Baronet, who is close by—for he is a punctual church-goer: it is feudal—says, informedly, "A row in that quarter!" nods sagaciously, and contains further information in closed lips. Her ladyship supposes it's the usual thing; need we know anything about it? She dismisses nuptial quarrels, presumably resulting from infidelities, with graceful languor; perhaps reserving such as are within the pale, sanctioned by titles. Judith, with the most perfect self-command, immovably graceful, says sweetly: "Is there a *row* between Mr. and Mrs. Challis?" On which her mother suddenly becomes petulant and human—comes down from Olympus as it were—exclaiming: "Why, Ju, you know you told me so yourself, child!—what nonsense!"

"Perhaps I used the wrong word," says Ju, undisturbed. "Have we any business with Mr. and Mrs. Challis's private affairs?"

"None at all, my dear! Jump in: you're keeping the horses." Her ladyship is in the carriage already, and will have no objection to driving away from Mr. and Mrs. Challis's private affairs. It was just like dear Mr. Taylor to begin talking about them, with everyone about.

But Judith has another scheme. She is going to walk,

thank you! Miss Caldecott and Phoebe and Joan may do the jumping in, and the carriage may drop them at the Rectory. Oh, very well!—if Miss Arkroyd really wants to walk. All settled. Only Joan puts in a demurrer; she means to walk with papa, and he will carry her on his shoulder. Joan is an anti-Sabbatarian of an advanced school, and often makes her father as bad as herself.

The Rectory is not really on the way to the Hall, but Judith's short cut to the latter is not far out of it for Joan and her man-servant, or ox, or ass—whichever is nearest—who ought to be doing no labour on this day. So, as soon as the Rector escapes from the small-talk of many parishioners on the road, and turns into the field path, Judith can effect an end she has in view. It was none of *her* doing, mind you!—this was the substance of her exordium—it was entirely mamma. What she referred to, after many minutes in abeyance, had revived the moment the last parishioner died away. But the Rector disallowed her line of pleading.

"Come, I say now, Judith!" He Christian-names the daughters of the Hall when alone with them, having known them as children. "Draw it mild! You must have told your *madre* something. Of course you did!"

"Yes. I was obliged to. But Mr. Challis did not mean me to. It was very difficult not to say something about what was in the letter. . . ."

"From Mr. Challis?"

"Yes. Mamma knows his handwriting, and asked me what was in it. It was too long for me to say—nothing! So I told her what I knew she must hear afterwards, but begged her to say nothing about it."

"And then she told Bess?"

"I'm extremely sorry to have to turn and rend my mother—especially coming from Church—but you see she has her idiosyncrasies, the *madre*. I assure you, dear Mr. Taylor, she actually went straight to Miss Caldecott, and said with the most unblushing effrontery that she had promised not to tell anyone, but that she knew she might do so safely to anyone so discreet, and then repeated what I had said to her, with additions. She is a trying mother sometimes!"

"And then Bess comes and tells me! You're a nice lot of *confidentes*. . . ." Something in Judith's look checks

his joking tone as he glances round at her, and he says, "What?" And then, "Yes—go on!" Then a hesitation leaves her, and she speaks:

"I will tell you more than I told mamma, Mr. Taylor. I wish to, because I think your advice would be good. Mr. Challis wrote to me—a long letter—we are friends, you know; I have seen a good deal of him. . . ."

"Quite right! I like Challis, you know."

"So do I;—though he might smoke less. However, we're none of us perfect. . . . Well!—I'm sorry to say the story is true. He fell out with Marianne—his wife is Marianne—the day after he arrived at home, although she had received him cordially enough on his arrival. She was at her mother's when he arrived, but came back to dinner. In the course of the evening they quarrelled, but I gathered from his letter that he thought it would blow over. Next morning they were civil to one another, but short of reconciliation. She went out in the morning, and in the afternoon he went away to a club-dinner. When he came back, quite late, he found a note from her, saying that she had gone away again to her mother's, and had taken her children with her."

"Good God!" The Rector's voice is a shocked undertone. "Was that Bob, and the two little girls. . . ? Oh yes!—he told me a good deal of his family."

"Not Bob; he's at school. The others are her own children; he isn't."

"I never was more shocked in my life. . . . Yes!—Joanikin. You'd better get down and walk a bit. There we are, all alive and kicking!" Joan is deposited on the ground, her legs in evidence. "But do tell me!—'took away her children with her'! She *can't*, legally."

"She has done it illegally, I presume." Judith is very equable over this point. "She has done it actually, anyhow!"

"What an extraordinary thing!" The Rector cannot get over it.

"Well!—it's true! He came back from his club, poor man, to find his house empty and his children gone. And no explanation but the note. He roused up the servants that were left, a cook named Steptoe and the housemaid, who said their mistress and the nurse and children had

packed a few things and gone away in a cab with a friend, about an hour after he left."

"It seems almost incredible—at first." He has to walk on a little way, fanning himself with his bandana handkerchief, before he can settle down from his amazement, and try for enlightening details. At last he says: "And then he wrote to you—when? Next day?"

"He left us, you remember, on Tuesday. His letter is dated Tuesday. The Tuesday after. Just a week."

"Would you object to my seeing it?"

"I should not. Why should I? But I fancy he did not wish anyone else to see it. I could tell you what there was in it, just as well. And then, dear Mr. Taylor, you will see why he wrote at such length to me about it. You must be wondering."

"I was."

"It was simply this. . . . By-the-bye, I dare say you heard how he set me on fire—that night we had the dance? . . . No? . . . Well, it was all connected with that. You know this Marianne of his would keep on refusing to come and see us, and I asked him to show me her letter with a message to me in it. We were out in our little Tophet garden, and it was too dark to read it. I thought one could read by moonlight, or I wouldn't have asked for it. Mr. Challis lighted a vesta for me to read by, and set me on fire . . . well—yes—I was just a little burned, on this shoulder. The worst of it was, her letter caught fire, and was burned to a cinder."

"But what harm did that do? She didn't want it back."

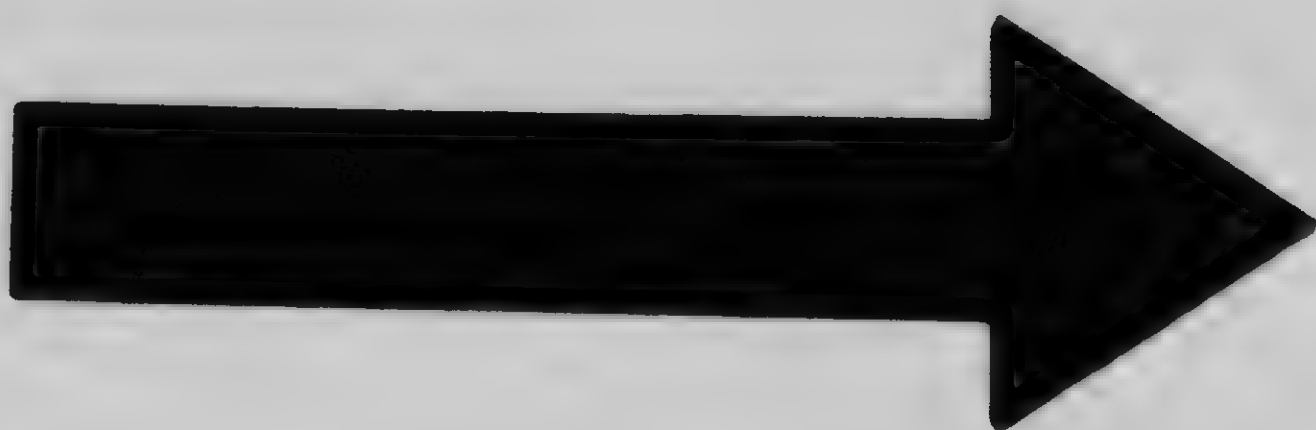
"No, she didn't. But there were two or three words on the back he hadn't read, and I couldn't tell him what they were. It seems she was surprised at his making no reference to them; and since he told me in his letter what he surmises they were, I can't say I wonder. I should have been."

"What were they? Or what does he suppose them to have been?"

"He might not like me to say, because she can never have meant them to be seen. It doesn't matter what they were. . . ."

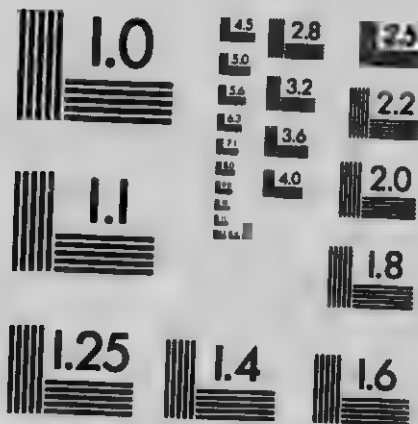
"Certainly, certainly! I quite understand."

"If he had known of them, he would have refused to



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show me the letter. As it turned out, it was most unfortunate. Because he said nothing except that he had given me her message to read . . ." Judith faltered—was coming to the difficult part.

" 'Message to read,' " said the Rector connectively. " Yes ? "

" Had given me her message to read, and had said nothing about when or where or how. And then the poor man had to account for the burning of the letter before he saw these words on the back . . . oh yes !—of course, one ought always to tell the whole truth in a fix ; I know that. But she had only his word for it that he had read the letter before and overlooked the postscript. Of course, what *she* thought was that her good gentleman was allowing a strange young lady—who isn't very popular with her—to open her confidential letters, and let him read them over her shoulder. Now do you appreciate the position, Rector ? " Probably this young lady was very glad that this way of accounting for Mrs. Challis's resentment franked her of referring to the possible effect on a jealous wife's imagination of the loneliness of Tophet and the moonlight, both of which were *sine qua non* to a true account of the conflagration. Surmises about Challis's passionate outburst were not to be encouraged by reference to any of the surroundings that provoked them. Let them be ignored, " sequin net "—which is not expensive, but deadly in the moonlight—and all !

So unsuspecting was Athelstan Taylor of the inner soul of a thorough-paced flirt that he thought he might indulge in a little subcutaneous paternal amusement, as of wider experience, at this young lady's seeming innocence of the constructions Mrs. Challis might attach to details of the story told in full. He nodded assent to his own insight. Oh yes !—he appreciated the position thoroughly ; Judith might be sure of that !—and points below the surface as well. But these belonged to a part of the drama altogether of minor importance, seeing how foregone a conclusion it was that no such thing as flirtation between a daughter of the Hall and a stray scribbler was possible. The fact that Challis had quarrelled with his wife was on another footing altogether. May there not have been some other cause ?



"Challis puts his wife's resentment down *entirely* to this matter of the opening of the letter?" The Rector's question comes after cogitation.

"Ye-es!—entirely, this time."

"H'm!—have there been other times?"

"He does not say so. That is not quite what I meant. I should have said that she seems to have accused him of untruthfulness before, or at least hinted at it. I don't gather that there has ever been a rupture between them. Don't let's walk fast, or we shall be back before you know what I am in it—I mean, what Mr. Challis wants me to do."

"I can come a little way on with you . . . why, of course, he wants you to write to his wife and confirm his version of this picturesque event. That's it, isn't it?"

"That's it. But what use will it be?"

Now for all Athelstan Taylor's superior insight into the world and its ways, it had not so far presented itself to him that a letter from Miss Arkroyd to Mrs. Challis on this subject might be like a red rag to a bull. It crossed his mind now, and kept him silent until Judith repeated: "What use will it be?" Then he replied uneasily: "Do you know?—I don't feel the ground firm under my feet. I shouldn't like to advise off-hand. What does your mother think?"

"Oh, I haven't talked to mamma, beyond what I told you. You see—she's dear, of course; but she's a sieve. And these are Mr. Challis's affairs, not mine . . . oh no!—I *know* he wouldn't mind my talking to you about them."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, I *know*! He would like me to talk to you, I'm certain."

"Would you mind talking to Bess about it? She's very sensible."

"I don't think Mr. Challis would like it. I am sure he would not mind you."

The Rector admitted this was possible, in his inner conscience. But he would make another suggestion: "Why not ask Addie what *she* thinks? She's coming to-morrow, on a visit to Lizarann."

"How is the little girl?"

"Getting on like a house on fire. But you will ask

Addie ? You needn't answer his letter yet, you know. At least, you needn't write to Mrs. Challis."

"Miss Fossett ? Isn't she, though—is she somehow some sort of connection of Mrs. Challis ?"

"Is she ?"

"Or isn't it ? . . . Oh, I know—it was a cousin of hers I met at the play. Mr. Challis hates her—the cousin. I didn't dislike her."

"She might know something. . . ."

"I don't think Miss Fossett would see much of this—Mrs. Partridge, I think the name was. But M.s. Partridge and Marianne are bosom-friends. So it might be worth . . ."

She interrupted herself. "Only isn't Miss Fossett . . . ?"

"Isn't she what ?"

"Well, then, doesn't she feel very strongly on the Deceased Wife's Sister question ?"

"What would that have to do with it ?"

"You know he married his deceased wife's sister ?"

"Eh ?" said the Rector. "So he did." And then, thoughtfully : "I see—I see—I *think* I see."

"See what ?"

"The reason why she took her children away. She thinks they are hers legally—thinks she has a right to them."

Judith evidently did not see the point involved, and the Rector had to explain that the children of an unmarried woman belong legally to their mother, and that probably Marianne, not being Challis's wife according to the law of the land, had imagined that her right to possession of them could be maintained in a law-court.

"But surely—it could !" said Judith.

"Ah, my dear young lady !"—was the answer—"little you know the amazing resources of legislation for deciding that the weaker party is in the wrong !"

But Judith did not want the conversation, to become a review of the iniquities of Law, a subject on which she knew Athelstan Taylor was given to being in revolt against constituted authority. So she brought him back to the real issue before the House.

"You haven't told me what you think I ought to write, Mr. Taylor. Please don't send me away to ask some-

body else!—that's such very cold comfort. Give me real advice. What can I say?"

It took a little time to decide, but was clear when it came. "The question, I take it, isn't whether the letter will do any good. I tell you honestly, I don't think it will. But Challis asks you to write, and that settles the matter. Well!—say you write at his request, and that he asks you to write exactly what happened. Do it as literally as possible."

"Say anything about how grieved I am—painful circumstances—hope to hear misunderstanding completely removed—anything of that sort?"

"Oh no!—no, on the whole, certainly not! Better keep off that as much as possible!"

"Won't it be rather like . . . snuffing poor Mrs. Challis out, if I don't end up somehow?"

"Hm—well! Suppose we go so far as to hope this will help to remove . . . to remove . . . what seems a perfectly groundless misunderstanding. Stop it at that. Quite enough! And I say, Judith, look here! In writing to Mrs. Challis, don't you go and show that you've heard particulars of the row. Stick to the explanation of the letter-business. Don't on any account show you know she has left her home, or that he has told about it."

"Won't that be what Mr. Tomes calls *suppressio veri*?"

"Tut—tut! If it is, not sending the letter at all will be *suppressio* of still more *veri*. You stick to what Challis asks for, and let him be responsible. Married couples, when they quarrel, are kittle cattle to shoe behind. Now we must say good-bye, or one of us will be late for lunch."

They had overshot the point at which the path diverged to the Rectory, and it was time to hark back. But before Judith was out of hearing the Rector called after her.

"Tell poor Challis I'm writing to him. I shall go and see him when I get up to town—some time next week. Good-bye!"

## CHAPTER XXXIII

MR. CHALLIS gave Lord Felixthorpe's chauffeur half-a-sovereign when he was landed at the Station. This was because he stood in such awe of that great man that he doubted if so haughty a soul would brook a tip at all. However, it not only brooked it, but changed it immediately for nine shillings in silver and eightpence in coppers and a glass of bitters at the Barleymow, opposite the Station. So Challis felt easy, and wondered to himself that so small a matter should disquiet him, with all his great perplexities on hand. How on earth did Napoleon Bonaparte contrive to exist?

However, all the perplexities came back in force as soon as he was off; indeed, he was almost sorry no small distraction occurred during his flight home. For he was alone nearly all the way to Euston; the many who nearly entered his carriage seeming to condemn him on inspection, and choosing every other carriage on its merits. The porter who put his valise on a cab at the terminus seemed callous and preoccupied; and the driver, when told to go to the nearest Metropolitan Station, struck him as too unsympathetic when he said: "Which will you have—King's Cross or Gower Street? It don't make no difference to *me*," not without some imputation of weakness of character. Also, this cabman appeared to form a lower opinion of his fare when the latter chose Gower Street than he would have had he chosen King's Cross.

By the time Challis had described a large segment of the Inner Circle, and had waited a quarter of an hour at Gloucester Road for a Wimbledon train, he had resolved that nothing could ever induce him to try that route again. Then a distasteful thought struck him:—should he ever make the same journey again? "Much better not," said he to himself; and kept on repeating it to him-

self till he had found his seat in the Wimbledon train, the gear of which caught the phrase, and seemed to repeat it to itself all the way to East Putney.

He had wired to Marianne: "Am coming home on business may come to lunch but don't wait Titus." The "may come to lunch" struck him as making this "business" seem plausible, without definite disingenuousness. He wanted to account for himself, and to make his sudden return a very matter-of-course occurrence. One thing was odd about it—and it was odder still that it never struck him as odd—that he should be so solicitous about not giving his wife an unnecessary start. He was just what he had always been in respect of his constant consideration of Marianne's comfort in small matters, and had never admitted to himself that his affection for her had varied as a necessary result of his infatuation for Judith. Had it done so, of necessity? It may not have—or it may. Psychological problems need not occupy a narrative of facts. This is one that might easily land us in an attempt to formulate an exact Definition of Love. Better beware in time! Leave the question in a condition of Meta-physical Equilibrium.

How Challis would have welcomed, just at this turning-point of his relations with Marianne—scouting as he did the idea of a rupture, so far—a thorough heart-whole *accolade* at the front garden-gate of the Hermitage! What an all-important factor in the moulding of the days to come would have been an unqualified, unmitigated, unreserved embrace—even before the cabman! Such a one as Penelope would have given Ulysses, if he had come back recognisable: a greeting to send the memories of all Calypsoes flying like chaff before the wind! Yes—even the appearance of Penelope on the threshold, revealing that Ulysses was just in time for lunch, only he must make haste, as it had been kept back to the very last minute, and he must keep all his news till afterwards. Any little thing of this sort—a note, spelt anyhow—a scribble on the slate in the hall, where you can write messages if there's a pencil—the slightest tradition of a consciousness of tea-to-come on the part of the departed, when departing—even a caution that you are not to spill, because it's a

clean tablecloth—*anything*, in fact, rather than the dull, neglected, flat reality of Challis's return!

Remembering how his last arrival at home had fallen through, he had organized a surprise in his own mind. He had so light a valise this time—one carries less wardrobe in hot weather—that it would be no encumbrance. He would discharge his cab, and let himself in with his latch-key.

The cabman's expression was one of dissatisfaction with his career, but acquiescence in fifty-per-cent. beyond the tariff. He said it was coming on a drizzle, and drove away. Then Challis had to give up the surprise. For the garden-gate was shut to and locked—"because of the boys," no doubt—and he had to ring. He kept his finger on the electric bell, to show that his mind was made up as to coming in; whereupon Harmood appeared bearing a key. Challis did not complain that she had not kissed him, but he did think she might have been warmer.

"Mrs. Challis never said, sir," was her brief testimony in reply to "Where was your mistress going?" The uncompromising roughness of "your mistress" may have widened the gulf between them. A suggestion that perhaps Mrs. Steptoe knew was met by the concession, "I could ask Mrs. Steptoe." Delay then resulted, as Mrs. Steptoe, though absolutely in ignorance, wished to produce a sort of meretricious effect of giving information, and had to make talk while she thought out spurious data.

"No, sir, I couldn't say Mrs. Challis ever said a word to me, not this morning. Not if you was to ask. But yesterday morning she did say, 'ash what there was of the chicken, and stew the scrag-end of the neck for the kitchen-dinner to-day. . . .'"

"Well!—and did she say where she was going? That's the point."

"I was coming to that, sir!" Mrs. Steptoe was reproachful. "The scrag-end of the neck for the kitchen-dinner to-day, because she might be going to Tulse Hill. And the young ladies would certainly be going to Mrs. Eldridge's all day. And this morning she says to me to have a piece of rump-steak in the house in case."

"In case I came." But Mrs. Steptoe had intended a

complete sentence. Challis concluded: "That's where she's gone, I expect! And the children are away?"

"The young ladies, sir." Thus Harmood, the stickler for the proprieties. To whom Challis says, "Very well!—Get me some lunch—steak—anything!" and goes to his room to wash, leaving Mrs. Steptoe recapitulating.

Was ever a blanker home-coming? Challis began to suspect he would certainly make hay of his life, unless some *deus ex machina* came into it. Was he a *dignus vindice nodus*? He put the question aside to read accumulated letters, kept back by request. Then lunch was on table, and life seemed suddenly as usual. But no Marianne, so far!

The drizzle "it" had "come on" made a dreary outlook from the house, and a sense of the absence of the children a conscious cause of dreariness within. No consolation could be found in the distant voices of the two servants at loggerheads in the basement. "Probably one specific loggerhead," thought Challis, as he gave real thought and care to the filling of a pipe he meant to enjoy. Because a certain incisive repetition, which seemed to relate to the same theme, conveyed the idea of diametrically opposed opinions, intemperately advocated by street-door knocks. A lull would come when Harmood brought him a cup of coffee—fresh-made, he hoped—and he would then hint broadly that the discussion was needlessly audible. "Keep the kitchen-door shut" is the usual formula.

The coffee came. It was over good for banning and over bad for blessing, like Rob Roy; only certainly not so strong. So thought Challis to himself—all such thoughts are his, not the story's—as he submitted to it. But he found a satisfaction for the ban he had withheld, in an increased acerbity of manner in his allusion to the kitchen-door. He called it out to Harmood as she departed, having sipped the coffee in the interim. "Yes, sir," said Harmood, speaking as though butter would not melt in her mouth.

However, the kitchen-door closed, and the discussion went on as though both the knockers' families had had a baby. It would not interfere with the pipe.

What was all this that had happened! He found himself asking space this, as he watched the smoke curling away, and changing to the smell he meant to let out of the window before Marianne came back. Now that he was here again, in his old surroundings, he could live back into them, and think of that intoxication of last night—only last night!—as nothing but a strange, bewitching dream. Never was man more susceptible to surroundings than Challis. Turn where he might, some trifle or other brought back his old days to him.

There, upon the chimney-piece, in defiance of modern taste, were certain treasures that had never found a place on a dustheap because of their various associations with "poor Kate." The parian candlesticks at either end—religiously mended whenever chipped, and one of them obliged to submit to a rivet—did he and Kate not buy them in Oxford Street, and were they not therefore precious? The Swiss haymakers, carved in wood, that were an early present of Marianne's to her sister, were they not—although, of course, they were not high art, and you might sneer at them—things Kate had valued, and on that account never to be discarded or forgotten? The ingenious ship under a glass cover, with chenille round its base, whose hull was musle-shells, and whose rigging spun glass, was it not a precious inheritance of past ages, treasured with curses, because every time was moved it tumbled over, and had to be taken from its shelter and made the subject of unskilful experiments with sealing-wax and gum-arabic? Each had its tale of a former time. And everything that said a word about Kate added a postscript about her sister.

Was it not as well that last night's folly or delirium should rank as a dream?—was it not best? If only Destiny could have become a visible Rhadamanthus and driven the nail home, saying, "Now that's settled, Mr. Challis, and you are not to see Miss Arkroyd of Royd again," and he could have believed all his experiences of the last eight months hallucinations! But he could not do so without a warranty, and a strong one. He happened to know that Royd Hall was still there, in Rankshire; and that a week-end ticket was sixteen and sixpence. Let



him try to make a dream of that, with Bradshaw ready to rise in evidence and denounce him! He could not but fail, with all the facts against him, in an attempt to quench his memories; but the more dream-like and unreal they seemed to him, the less guilty he felt of duplicity towards Marianne. Other men might not have felt so; but this is his story, and we must take him as we find him.

Would any other man in like case have fashioned, as he did, the rough-hewn incidents of a scene in which he should make a clean breast of the whole tormenting dream to his wife, get absolution, and be once more his natural self, with no reserves? How on earth should he set about it? that was the thought that started it. Suppose he succeeded in saying, "Polly Anne, I'm a bad, wicked man, and I've been making love to Judith Arkroyd, and forgetting my duty to the wife of my bosom and her kids," would Marianne know what would be a correct attitude for an injured matron under her circumstances? Would she be able to say perjured and forsworn and betrayer, and hence!—ere she did some correct thing or other? Not she! But suppose instead she were to say, "Just one minute, till I've done with Harmood, and I shall be able to listen to you. . . . Now, what is it?" what on earth would he do then with the position? Say it all over again, or try a variation, "You see before you a guilty *et cetera*," or something of that sort? No, no!—that would never do. Why, part of the awkwardness of the position was that the word *guilty* would overweight the confession so terribly. None of the substantial conditions of broken marriage-vows had been complied with, and it really would be difficult to know exactly what to confess to. How could he know that Charlotte Eldridge—for, dramatist that he was, he threw that lady down to the ground!—would not have dismissed the case with, "You see, my dear, there really hadn't been anything!"

And all the while the worst of it was that, according to his own canon of morals, there had been *everything*. He had profaned the temple of Love, soiled the marble floor, torn some chaplet from the altar; done something, no matter what, that was making him a secret-keeper from his wife; that would make him flinch from her gaze.

Were other men all like that? No, certainly not! But then, they were not milksops, but Men of the World. Also, they worshipped at another temple, down the road, those merry satyrs; a temple where Pan and Silenus had altars.

No doubt this analysis of his own case, that Challis makes as he gets on with that pipe—near its end now—and waits to hear his wife's cab at the gate, would have clashed a good deal with his seeming reckless speech among men; speech he was apt to get himself a very bad name by, among precisians! But he was made up of oddities and paradoxes. Is any light thrown on him by what he is reported to have once said: "I can't see that it can matter how many wives—or whatever you like to call them—a man has, if he doesn't care twopence about any of them, and they all know it"? The funny part of this creed of Challis's about marriage and his fellow-men was that it caused them to ascribe to *him* precisely the same morals that he had ascribed to *them*; and that each one of them, whenever he chanced to speak of it in confidence to any one he was not on his guard against, always appeared to disclaim attendance at the temple down the road for himself, personally; and, in fact, to suggest that he, exceptionally, had common decency in a corner somewhere.

No man will ever know—one may say that much safely—how far any other man is like himself. He is pretty sure to invent a curious monster for his fellow-man to be, based on all his own worst propensities; but utterly ignoring that mysterious impulse to fight against them which he has the egotism to call his better self. He credits himself, personally, with an inherent dislike of evil, and conceives that his fellow-man is kept in check by the Decalogue. He ascribes Original Sin to the race, and credits himself secretly with a monopoly of Original Virtue.

But it is unfair to go on moralising in this way, merely because Marianne does not come back. The justification is that Challis spent such a long time in useless self-torment over his position; he all the while believing quite sincerely that real men of the world—say, broadly speaking, Mr. Brown and Lord Smith—practised double-dealers that they were in all that relates to womankind, would have

dismissed the whole matter with an experienced smile. In the course of an hour, however, he endeavoured to imitate the spirited demeanour of Mr. Brown and Lord Smith, and went away to his room to write.

He had to acknowledge that he could not fix his attention as Mr. Brown and Lord Smith would have done; but he made a fair show of writing, too—felt he had got to work again! Marianne would be back to tea; he was glad of that. He was distinctly not at all sorry to find he was glad of that. But he was a little annoyed that it had occurred to him to make the discovery—that he had not left the question dormant.

The noise in the kitchen below was almost inaudible in Challis's room, but a sense hung about of the remains of an engagement elsewhere. Challis was conscious that a dropping fire stopped when he rang the bell at four-thirty, to tell Harmood not to get the tea till her mistress came back. Harmood consented, provided that the obnoxious expression was withdrawn. Only she did not put it that way. What she said was "To wait it for Mrs. Challis, sir!" Had Challis answered, "Yes, your mistress!" she might have shown a proper spirit. But as he said, with discretion, "Exactly!" Miss Harmood consented to postpone tea. His phrase seemed to admit inexactness in the epithet "mistress."

But the young lady was going to make no suggestions. If Mr. Challis liked to go without his tea, let him! *She* was not going to attempt to influence anybody. The hours passed, and ink that might have perished on a pen-wiper became a permanent record of thoughts which their writer always doubted the value of the moment after writing them. But perhaps they were immortal? No one would ever know till the very end of Eternity.

Was that actually six o'clock? Well—she wouldn't come now till dinner! He considered a short walk before she turned up; but the drizzle was one of those all-pervading drizzles that despise umbrellas, and do the garden a world of good. One never goes out for a walk in those drizzles. He would have another pipe, and think it over—perhaps write a little more presently.

He would have done more wisely to write the little

more at once—to remain hard and fast at his writing-table. For he had not been long over the second pipe when the summer sun, now on its way to roost, got a chance to peep through a cloud-rift, and straightway Wimbledon was aware it was the heart of a rainbow it could not see, however palpable it might be at Esher. Now, it chanced that just at the moment when the sudden prismatic glow flooded that vulgar, incorrigible drizzle, and clothed it in an undeserved radiance, Challis was watching the crystal beads that chased each other in a line along the under-edge of a sloping gutter above his window. He was wondering why they held on so tight—it was so seldom one dropped—when on a sudden they all became jewels, each with a little complete image of the sun in it, if they would only have stood still while one looked! And these jewels brought back a something to his mind. He felt it coming before he could define it: what was it going to be? Why, of course!—the gleaming beads or scales or spangles on Judith's dress, last night in the little garden with the funny name—what was it?—Tophet.

And then it all came back with a rush. He had contrived, in his home-surrounding, to dodge and evade, as it were, his memory of his folly of last night for a moment. He had now slipped unawares into his past; and malicious recollection had brought back this-and-that that was pleasant in it, but had closed the door against reminders of all that had been tedious and distasteful in his later married life. With no Marianne there in the flesh, to call attention to that morose and jealous temper she had developed in these latter years, he had indulged in the luxury of forgetting it; and had repeopled the empty house with a cheerful version of its mistress, one that was exactly what the Marianne of old ought to have grown up into—not very clever, certainly—not Madame de Staël, by any means—but always good-humoured and ready to laugh at her own blunders, and gradually outgrowing that terrible vice of blood, that dire form of Christianity that made it a wonder to him how his new friend, that good parson-chap at Royd, should be tarred with the same feather. He had got into a backwater of the stream of life, and found a happy anchorage for a moment; and here came

the torrent he had escaped, and caught him up and whirled him away with it, Heaven knows where! Little things make the great things of life, and no sooner was that miserable gew-gaw that was not even an expensive article brought across his mind by those jewel-drops flashing in the sun than he became again the heart-distempered victim of the image it brought with it—Judith in all her beauty, at its best in the moonlight. His incipient fit of reconciliation to his home had only been momentary, and the paroxysm of his disorder that upset it—how rightly he had spoken of it as a fool's passion!—sent him pacing to-and-fro across the room, catching at the empty air with nervous fingers, pressing them mercilessly on his eyes, as though he would crush out with them the beautiful image of the woman that bewitched him.

This sort of thing is not so uncommon as you, perhaps, think. You have read of it, of course—best told by Robert Browning, perhaps—how “the Devil spends a fire God gave for other ends.” That was like to be Challis's case if this went on.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

JUST as the cloud-rift closed and spoiled the rainbow a sound came of a cab approaching. Challis stopped in his restless pacing to-and-fro, and listened. . . . Yes!—the cab was stopping. That might be Polly Anne? The fact that his mind said "Polly Anne," by preference, showed that his relief at her arrival—for he was one of those who always fidget when folk are overdue—outweighed for the moment a feeling that he would be glad when he had passed the Rubicon of looking her in the face. He was conscious, though, as he ran downstairs to meet her, of a trace of the alacrity one shows as one enters the dentist's sanctum, to convince oneself one is really ready to have one's molar out. But before he got to the swing-round of the banister curve he knew it wasn't Marianne after all, this time!

Then, on the lower flight, he became conscious that it was that booby John Eldridge; saying, as one in indecision: "No—stawp a bit! I'll tell you in a minute," and then somehow contriving—as it were to fill out a pause for thought—a certain bubbling or wobbling noise, made with the end of his tongue between his lips. It was brief, for he soon added: "Suppose you was to tell him I was here! I can't see that any harm 'll come o' that. What's your idea?"

But Harmood's idea, if she had one, remained concealed behind her professional manner; which was what the Sphinx's might have been, had the latter taken a house-and-parlourmaid's place. For, perceiving Challis on the stairs, she passed her visitor on to him without reply, merely saying: "Mr. Eldridge, if you was at home, sir." This formula left it open to her to cancel or ignore Mr. Eldridge if her employer thought fit to deny his own existence in the face of evidence.

"I *am* here," said Challis, descending. "Like the

Duke's motto! Marianne isn't, but I'm expecting her every minute. Anything up?" This query related to a certain rosy uneasiness that hung about Mr. Eldridge's hesitation of manner.

"Oh no! No—nothing! Only Lotty said you were coming back to-day. Suppose we was to come in here!" "Here" was the front sitting-room, looking to the road. Harmood closed the street-door, and died respectfully away.

"By all means," said Challis. "Out with it, John!"

Mr. Eldridge struggled with obstacles to speech, which he endeavoured, by ostentatious clearing of the throat, to refer to chronic bronchitis. At last he got to "Mind you, Master Titus, it's ten to one there's nothing in it! But I thought it just as well to look in and tell you." Challis waited, with an ugly misgiving growing on him, till two words with a shock in them came, blurted out by the speaker, whom they left perturbed, mopping his brow and polishing his nose with his handkerchief. "Railway Collision!" said Mr. Eldridge. "Bad job! But don't you run away with the idea that..."

"That—that she—Marianne..."

"Ah! Well!—I tell you, Master Titus, I don't believe she was in the train."

"You know nothing about it! Why didn't you stay to find out?" Challis finds natural irritation with this booby's method an easement against the new strain on his powers of bearing anxieties. One good point about which is that Judith and Royd Hall vanish with a clean sweep. Face to face suddenly with a hideous possibility, that Marianne may be killed or maimed for life, he is completely back in his old life again, and knows nothing outside the tension of the moment. In a very few seconds he sees that his informant *does* know nothing; having evidently, when he witnessed or heard of this accident, become the slave of a singular and not uncommon idea that the sooner ill news is heard the better, and having rushed off with his without waiting for details or confirmation. Challis gives him up as quite useless as an informant. "Your cab's there?" he asks. And receiving an affirmative, says with decision: "Wait till I get my boots on!"

Mr. Eldridge throws a bit of good counsel after him as he runs upstairs three steps at a time. "Don't you get in a stoo, Master Titus! Easy does it." He then retires into the parlour, and fidgets, variously. He drums on surfaces that offer themselves, feels about on his razor-farm for interesting incidents, whistles truncated tunes that do not last to identification-point, and frequently repeats, "Nothing to go by—nothing to go by—nothing to go by!" shaking his head and looking profound, till Challis comes quickly downstairs. He calls out to Harwood in some remote background that he is going out, and doesn't know when he'll be back.

The cabman is good for information, and coherent. A petroleum explosion on the train from Haydon's Road. Just coming into the Station, and hadn't slowed down enough. Guard injured—couldn't apply the brake. Train ran beyond platform, and collided with truck, shunting. What did they want to be shunting trucks for, with the train just due? Anyone might have known there might be a petroleum explosion, and the guard not be able to apply the brake. Or anything else, for that matter! Anyone hurt? Oh ah, yes!—people enough hurt, if you came to that. All right! You two gents, if you jumped in, should be at the Station in no time.

Did you ever have the ill-luck to be the seeker after a possible casualty in a railway accident? If you have you will be able to guess what Challis went through in the hour that followed. Fortunately for him, the crucial moment of inspection of the bodies of two women unknown, for identification, was soon over. To a certainty, neither was Marianne. So also the few cases too bad for immediate removal were soon decided about—some without visiting them; these having been able to give their names. And if Marianne had been among those who had started for home, whether injured or scot-free, she would have been met on the road. They would have been sure to see her, or she them.

Moreover, there were not many people in the train, and Mrs. Challis was well known at the Station. She was a constant passenger by this line, going to Tulse Hill via Streatham. The officials at the Station felt sure they would have seen her had she been in the train. No other train



would follow for some time that Mrs. Challis could possibly come by. Probably she had missed her train at Tulse Hill. Good job too, for her, said public opinion.

So Mrs. Challis's husband, relieved, but with a swimming head, and very uncharitable feelings in his heart towards the originator of all this needless alarm, drove home beside that really very stupid person; and so far as his own condition of semi-collapse permitted it, gathered the story of his friend's share in the matter, and what he considered a justification of his action.

It appeared that Mr. Eldridge had accompanied his wife to Wimbledon Station, on her way to an evening appointment in London. As she was getting into the carriage, the train on the other line came in from Haydon's Lane. She said to her husband: "That's Marianne's train; she was going to Tulse Hill. You can drive her back in your cab. You'll find Titus at home. He was to be back to-day." Then, as her train left the platform, he saw a sudden blaze of fire from the guard's van of the other one; and the collision, as already described, resulted. A cooler or stronger judgment than John Eldridge's would no doubt have exhausted every source of information rather than jump at the conclusion that his friend's wife was necessarily among the injured because he could not find her among the survivors. His reasoning powers were not strong enough to stand by him through the panic of the scene that ensued, and he could see nothing for it but to convey the news of the supposed disaster to her husband.

Challis was inhospitable enough not to press him to come in and dine, and was so annoyed with his folly that he might not have done so even if less desirous of a quiet evening with the subject of all this alarm, who would no doubt appear in due course, though the best part of an hour late. He felt secure that nobody could be connected hypothetically with one mishap, and actually with another, on the same evening! Impossible! Mr. Eldridge seemed not so confident; for he said at parting, "Good-bye, Master Titus! Glad Marianne wasn't killed by *this* train!" and drove off to his own domicile.

The garden-gate was not locked; this was owing to Challis's return. For he always insisted that the front-door

should be approachable, boys or no, when he was in residence. He got in with his latch-key, and going straight to the top of the kitchen-stairs, called out to Harwood, whose response came duly.

"Tell Mrs. Steptoe she must keep dinner back. Your mistress will be late."

"I beg your pardon, sir!"

"Tell—Mrs.—Steptoe she must keep—dinner—back!" Challis endorsed his mandate with forcible word-isolations, and gave fuller particulars of his reasons why. Harwood responded rather tartly:

"I beg your pardon, sir! Did you say Mrs. Challis?"

"Yes!"

"Mrs. Challis is come in, sir. Been in half-an-hour!"

"God bless me!" exclaimed Challis; and nearly added, "Why didn't you tell me?"—which would have been absurd. But he was saved from this by a voice from the floor above; Marianne's, unmistakably.

"Oh dear!—What *are* you shouting down into the kitchen for? Why can't you come up?"

"I'm coming, dear! When on earth did you come in?" His salute was cordial. Hers was... well!—she might have done better. But then, you see, she knew nothing about all this excitement that was afoot. And never forget that Mrs. Steptoe's legend of Ramsgate always hung in her mind.

"I've been in this past half-hour. Why did you go out again? It makes things so late."

"I'll tell you directly. How on earth did you get here?"

"How on earth did I get here?" It is slowly dawning on her that something has happened. "I drove from the Station. Just as usual!... I suppose that's the children."

"But how came we not to meet you?"

"Who?"

"John Eldridge and I—driving down to Wimbledon."

"How can I tell? I've not been at Wimbledon. I came from East Putney, as I told you, in a cab. You'd better get ready for dinner."

"All right! But how came you to come by East Putney?"

Marianne always had an irritating way of treating her

husband as though he were inaudible and invisible. No doubt she meant no harm by it. But husbands do feel secretly nettled sometimes if they are, as it were, held in abeyance by a waved hand, to await the end of a colloquy they are excluded from. Challis felt, at least, that he was very good-humoured not to be nettled.

"What has made the children so late? I said no later than six." So spoke the lady, eliciting revelations of delay caused by the children hiding themselves. Due public censure of the offence followed.

Challis had become himself again by soup-time. "Well, Polly Anne," said he, "you've never told me how you came to go by East Putney!" The trifling excitement over the child had such a thoroughly old-world flavour with it that he was very much at home again, and Royd Hall had slipped away to dreamland.

"Oh, I?" Marianne is not ill-humoured now. But she is, to a certain extent, enduring her lot. You know how that's done? "A little bit of stopping came out of my front tooth, and I had to go up to Kensington to get it seen to. Of course, I hadn't written, and Roots and Leaver kept me an hour and a half."

"What did he have to do? . . . painful? . . ."

"Oh no—nothing! He put some fresh stopping. Only a few minutes! What took you to Wimbledon?"

"Well—you see!—our excellent friend John Eldridge came and told me you were killed in the accident at Wimbledon Station. . . ."

"Oh! Was there an accident?"

"Yes. Nobody we know in it. But two women killed and several injured. It was petroleum." He gave particulars of the accident, dwelling on the fact that the wrecked train was the one his wife would have been in if she had not been at the dentist's. "But I *was* at the dentist's," she said, with a certain implication in her voice of "So I don't see what you have to complain of."

However, it slowly dawned upon her that this was a case for recognition of the mercies of Providence. These were of two classes; one of which, known to her as Divine Forgiveness towards Sinners, on condition that they went

to church, was an entirely different thing from certain good-natured impulses on the part of the Creator towards persons in difficulties, prompting special intervention on their behalf to save them from the blunders of Creation now that He had set it fairly going, and left it to shift for itself. He was, it appeared, very catholic in these impulses, as often as not giving non-churchgoers the benefit of His reserved rights of intervention in the caprices of the material universe. Challis believed that his wife used up all the theological liberality of which she was capable in ascribing let-offs of Jews, Turks, Heretics, and Infidels to special interventions which could only postpone for a very short time their Eternal Damnation at the hands of the intervening power.

However, he was in no mood just now for laughing at her; so he let it be supposed that he acquiesced in what amounted to a suggestion that Providence had knocked out that bit of stopping from her front tooth in order to prevent her coming by that train. He kept absolute silence through her acknowledgment of her indebtedness to her Maker, being very careful not to allow his features to assume any expression whatever. For he had found by experience that absolute glumness, total suspension of speech and facial movement, with great caution and reserve in the use of the pocket-handkerchief, if resorted to, was almost a religious force in itself.

When the good lady had sufficiently discharged all her obligations in the proper quarter, another aspect of the case seemed to present itself. "But, my dear Titus, what a terribly anxious time you must have had!"

He would sooner have had this earlier. Providence could have waited. But—sooner now than never! "Why, my dear old girl," said he, "I was simply terrified out of my wits!" A hearty laugh came with this all the easier that it was his order of release from the ten-minutes penal servitude he had just undergone in the cause of his wife's religious sensibilities. "Come now, old woman," he went on, "say you're sorry for giving me such a fright."

"Why—of course I'm sorry! What makes you suppose I'm not? I don't want to give you frights, I'm sure!" She paused a moment over the subject. Though *she* was

not killed, it might touch her home-circle at some other point. "I wonder who the women were. Our laundress brings the Wash from Streatham. It might have been her coming to-day." She went on with particulars of the Wash; how it itself was centred at Wimbledon, but there was a *succursale* at Streatham, whence fine linen, got up, might be brought by rail. Challis interrupted:

"These two women I saw were not washerwomen."

"Oh dear!—were they ladies?" A note of alarm. Marianne had assumed that they were people. Challis strove not to seem to broach derision on the well-worn subject. He said seriously, "Ye-es, I think so." But then his inherent vice of mind got the better of him, and he added: "Not Duchesses, certainly! But ladies, yes! Perhaps they were Baronets' wives."

Marianne flushed angrily. "Now, Titus, you know that's nonsense! How is it likely that both of them should be Baronets' wives, when there they were in the same train. And you know perfectly well no one ever said a word about Duchesses! So it's ridiculous!" But still a shot home seemed wanting, so after a pause Marianne ended up: "I suppose it was meant to be witty. Only if it's to be that, I shan't sit with you while you smoke."

"No, Polly Anne dear, it's not to be that. Never mind my chaff! I had the impression they were people in our own sort of position in life—might have been friends of ours, don't you know! But we shall hear fast enough."

This conversation had taken longer than appears by the story; because, at a repast, converse travels slowly. Steptoe, or her equivalent, has to be found fault with at intervals, deservedly. By this time the best end of the neck, and the difficulty of carving it, were things of the past. So also was a slight sub-ruction occasioned by Challis being disgusting about Anne Boleyn's neck, and the bungling executioner who wanted all his patients' necks to be jointed at the butcher's. It was an old joke of his that always enraged Marianne. But he had begged pardon, and the topic had vanished with its cause. This and some minor matters had made it coffee-time, when Marianne threatened to retire and leave Challis to enjoy his pipe alone.

She did not do so, being assuaged by her husband's seeming acceptance of social distinctions. But it rankled, too, as will be seen by the first thing she says to him as he settles down to his pipe. "Duchesses, indeed!"

If it were fine they would be out in the garden at the back. Only the drizzle is there still. But it keeps very close, too, and we must have the window wide open. The lamp won't blow out if we stand it away on the sideboard. This sideboard is the one that was bought—such a bargain!—for Great Coram Street. Those rings on the drawers that swing—handles to pull them open and find the cork-screw—are the rings that Bob in his infancy was permitted to use as knockers in a drama he was the hero of—a post-man who delivered letters at very short intervals indeed. Oh, how his surroundings of this evening stung Challis with memories of his past! How they drove home to him the need to keep at bay those outlying fires—or wild beasts, were they?—that had made an inroad on his present.

If he could only have been a Roman Emperor now! Had he not read lately somewhere how Hadrian had married two Persian Princesses—real ones!—two at once!—as cool as a cucumber? Oh dear!...

What is that Marianne is saying? "You're not the one to talk, Titus!"

"Talk about what, Polly Anne?" His first puff, with this, and he is in great comfort and good-humour! The wild beasts are standing over.

"About Duchesses and Baronets' wives! Just look at your Grosvenor Squares!" There is little or no ill-humour here. Rather it might be called concession to good-humour; an admission of her husband's friends to their talk as permanent objects—forgiven objects, certainly—of critical raillery. No harm meant!

And if there were, Challis would ignore it, rather than have his pipe spoilt. "Don't let's talk about them," he says. "Let's talk about our Grosvenor Squares."

"Your Grosvenor Squares!"

"My Grosvenor Squares, then! Polly Anne shall have her own way." And then he had to stifle at birth a most excruciating thought: "If I had only just succeeded in keeping my accursed folly under, I might now have con-

tinued, 'You know, Polly Anne dear, they might be *your* Grosvenor Squares, too, and nothing could please me better. Why not be jolly?' How could he make such a speech now? His only chance of a real tranquil life was to keep as far away from the source of his disturbance as possible. He succeeded in suffocating the thought, and repeated, "Let's talk about my Grosvenor Squares."

Marianne's reply was a grudging sound. "Well!—and how are they?" The unspoken addendum seemed to be: "I suppose I must say *something*. What do you make of this, my minimum? Take it!"

But Challis was in for pretending that all was well, and the world unsullied by what Mr. Riderhood called "offences giv' and took." Everybody was very well at Royd, he testified. Only this time the house-party was so overpowering that he had not seen nearly so much of the family as on the previous occasion. In fact, some of the members he had hardly spoken to—a statement so intensely true that it brought his veracity up to a reasonable average.

"Of course," he said, "I was obliged to talk a bit to the old boy. Just as he was obliged to compliment the celebrated author on his last book. But I never got on the subject on which he is really interesting, the inner life of the Feudal System..."

"Which is..." said Marianne. Who, on being offered "William the Conqueror" as a substitute for his System, added: "Oh, I know! We used to say him, 'William the Conqueror, one thousand and sixty-six.'" Challis continued:

"Last time we had quite a long talk over it, and I'm not at all sure that we don't agree in the long run. He contends that the ideal of Feudalism..."

"What's that?"

"Same as the Feudal System...that the ideal of Feudalism, properly understood, is quite the noblest..."

"I beg your pardon, dear! Just one moment! *Yes—Harmood!...what?* You *must* come near and speak louder... Well!—I suppose he must have eightpence. But tell him another time I shall go to Cowdery's, because they did them for sixpence. You haven't twopence in coppers, have you, dear?" Challis had, and the incident,

whatever it was, closed. Marianne's economical instincts, needed in old days, had survived their necessity overmuch.

But the ideal of Feudalism didn't get properly understood that time. Challis left it, and began somewhere else: "Her ladyship I scarcely talked to at all, which I was sorry for, as I don't dislike her, and I fancy she knew some people named Nettlefold when I was a boy." He was quite aware of careless construction, fraught with suspicion of imbecility; it really didn't matter. "As for Sibyl..."

"Do you mean Judith?"

"I mean Sibyl. I fancy she'll end by marrying that Lord Felixthorpe. They are always about in his motor together. By-the-bye, I hardly know how to thank that chap. He lent me his motor to the station this morning. I like him. He's too good for Sibyl."

But Marianne's attention has been caught by the honey in a flower on the way. "I don't understand these people and their ways," she says. "But I suppose it's all right if it's a motor. Charlie says because of the chauffeur."

Challis's sense of the ludicrous gets the upper hand. "I should have thought the chauffeur would be too much preoccupied," says he. "Anyhow, I shouldn't be at all surprised to hear they were engaged, any day. As for the party itself, there were some very interesting people this time, and some most interesting talk on abstruse subjects after dinner."

But the lady felt she would rather hear Mrs. Eldridge on the meaning of the word "abstruse" before she ventured out of her depth about it. A queer word, that! Also, she does not mean to have Judith elided in this way. "What about the other one?" she says bluntly.

There it was!—the gist of the whole situation in a nutshell. *What* about the other one? As Challis laid down his pipe, half-smoked—a strange thing for him—he was aware that, without being absolutely tremulous, it would not do for him to bring his teeth very near together without touching, or they would chatter. They must be either clutched or parted. It is just possible that people exist who have never had this experience.



## CHAPTER XXXV

PEOPLE go on making believe a thing is true which each knows to be false, or *vice versa*, a very long time. But when each believes the other thinks he knows nothing about the matter—or everything about it, as may suit his case best—reciprocal deception will have a still longer life. And longer still when each believes the other thinks that he believes . . . and so on across and across *ad infinitum*, in shuttlecock flights! Our own belief is that if this topic were discussed by Senior Wranglers, one or more of them would say something intelligible, which we can't, about the term of mutual deception increasing as the square of the distance of the shuttlecock flights, or their number. The first sounds best.

At what stage of the labyrinth of reciprocities were Mr. and Mrs. Challis left when the gentleman laid down his pipe? Perhaps, considering that one has other uses for one's brain, it is safest to leave that question unanswered. But there was this difference between them—that Mrs. Step-toe's Ramagate tale had made of Marianne's mind a fruitful soil for suspicion; while Titus's, apart from a tendency to detect the influence now and again of Charlotte Eldridge, was disposed to acquit his wife of any ingenuity in cultivating crops of the weed—indeed, of very few mental subtleties of any sort whatever. She was to him the incarnation of stupidity and abstract goodness, a solid substratum of which was an article of faith with him, reconcilable with any amount of little tempers, or big ones. And this faith went the length of supposing that Polly Anne credited him with it, and knew it would prevent him imagining that she could think him capable of believing that she could foster suspicions against him. Simple and intelligible!

But the nervous tremor that seized on Cha<sup>llis</sup> when he

laid his pipe down just now was too palpable to leave reciprocal deceptions intact, unless accounted for as foreign to the subject. Therefore, when Marianne recognised the abnormal nature of the pipe-movement by saying, with the mien of an answer-seeker, "Are not you going to finish your pipe?" he felt that some intrepidity was called for, for both their sakes.

"Fancy I got a little chill in the damp... oh no!—I changed everything. Besides..."

"Besides what?"

"Well—it was such an awful business, you know!" Why, when we were driving down to the station, how was I to know I shouldn't find you burned to a cinder? Just fancy!—Polly Anne!"

"You wouldn't have cared," says Marianne, softening. This was an improvement, and none the worse for the serious note in Challis's voice as he referred again to his relief when he knew the alarm had been for nothing. Nevertheless, in a sense, he was glad it was true that he had gone through strain enough to account for fifty nervous ague-fits. But he felt a dreadful hypocrite for all that! Just fancy!—availing himself of the incident to cover his embarrassment in answering a plain question about his young lady friend. But his duplicity *was* really for Marianne's sake as well as his own. Come now!

"I tell you what, Tite: you must have a regular good strong hot toddy to-night, with plenty of lemon. I'll make it for you." This was good—almost Coram Street again! Why spoil it? "I can't think what could possess you to go catching cold at the station. It didn't do any good." But she improved it: "You must have it after you're in bed, and you must have my *duvet*." Challis made no immediate protest against this policy, but the prospect of a June night under a *duvet* can never be tempting, even when one anticipates the sleep of a clear conscience. He was, however, really grateful, kissing a rather improved countenance his wife advanced on application: this phrase is taken from his mind, which had taken it, *more suo*, from the moneylender's column in the *Times*.

"It isn't anything; I've no objection to the toddy, though. Now, tell me some more about your mother..."

about the dentist... anything... oh, by-the-bye!—one of my letters was from Bob. It's upstairs... I'll go and fetch it."

"Never mind it now! Or I can send Harmood. You didn't answer my question."

"Let me see—what *was* the question? No, don't ring! Harmood won't know where to find it. Besides, I don't want her fishing about among my papers." And the obstinate man went, and came back with the letter. If he hoped that the previous question was going to lapse, he was mistaken.

"The question was about your friend Miss Arkroyd." She took Bob's letter, opened it, and made a pretence of looking at it. But she left her restatement, with all the force it had gathered by delay, for his consideration while she did so.

He stood behind her, looking over her shoulder at Bob's letter. The exact thing that crossed his mind as he did so was that he had now a new box of wax vestas in his pocket. But, then, he had had to quash the thought that suggested it. "That's a portrait of the new second master putting on his trousers," said he. "What about my friend Miss Arkroyd, Polly Anne dear?... No, that's not his real name. Pitt's his real name... Rev. Jairus Pitt... Oh, well!—boys will be boys, you know..."

But Marianne was not to be turned from her purpose by the Rev. Jairus Pitt, whose parents had not baptized him considerably. "Is it all settled about her going on the stage?... handsome Judith?"

So strangely had last night's image of Judith—or, rather, her identity—cancelled her previous one of the stage aspirant, that Challis all but exclaimed, "Oh, of course!—she *was* going on the stage. Actually I had forgotten that!" For he *had* forgotten it—Estrild and all!—in the outbreak of fever in which he had so completely forgotten himself and his position and his duties. But he kept to himself what would have been unintelligible to Marianne; not without a feeling of relief that her question had reminded him of an aspect in which Judith could be easily discussed by both, without any *arrière pensée*.

"Handsome Judith," said he seriously and equably as

he resumed his seat, "has given up all idea of going on the stage. That's at an end."

"Oh!" A short and thick exclamation, very conclusive.

"I shall have to find some one else to play Estrild if I finish the play...."

Mrs. Challis was considering. "She's going to be married, of course," she said.

"H'm! —I've no reason to suppose she is."

"You said her sister was?"

"I said something about Sibyl and Lord F. Yes!—but they're not twins, you know, she and Judith!"

"I know that. Really, Tite, I'm not the goose you always try to make me out! Besides, twins *don't*, invariably: sometimes one dies of a broken heart."

"Judith won't die of a broken heart when her sister marries," says Challis dryly.

"I understand. But, Tite dear, do consider! A married sister younger than herself!"

"Miss Arkroyd isn't the sort of party to contract matrimony in order to walk in front of her sister at Court. Besides, there might not be another coronet handy, to walk in front with."

"What sort of party is she, then?" Challis thought to himself that a certain class of stupidity makes as formidable a cross-examiner, sometimes, as cleverness itself. Getting no immediate reply, his wife repeated, "Well!—what sort?"

"She's a problem; that's the expression nowadays. I'm not sure it isn't as good as another."

"Never mind the expression! You know you admire her very much."

"I do. But, you see, Polly Anne!—she won't act Estrild. So where are we?" What a boon Estrild, recollected just in time, had been in this conversation!

"What excuse does she give for backing out?" The speaker's grim attitude towards suggested breach of faith grated on her husband. But that was all in the day's work—the bad day's work!

"I think I'll have another pipe.... Oh yes!—I'm feeling all right again now; it was nervous, after that horrible affair at the station.... I'll fill it up new, and then I'll tell the whole story."

"I have no wish to pry into Miss Arkroyd's affairs. However, tell me if you like."

"Not if you don't like!" Challis is again puffing in comfort at this point, and, to our thinking, matters are going easier. No particular reply comes from Marianne, and he assumes a disclaimer, saying, "All right, Polly Anne! I'll go on. It seems that the great Idea had something to do with it. . . ."

"Let's see!—that's the Fine Art turn-out. . . ."

"Yes; the new Art and Craft affair—Sibyl's. There was a family row when she proposed to put up her name, with 'Limited' after it, over a shop in Bond Street." He went on, and narrated briefly how Sibyl had met her parents' remonstrances by saying that if Judith went on the stage, she didn't see for her part why *she* shouldn't conduct a business. Especially as it was distinctly understood that mechanics would not be employed; only craftsmen. Also that the articles sold would not be things, but art-products. Also that they would be curiously wrought. How the Bart. had interrupted her, to ask what on earth she meant by Judith going on the stage! For the most palpable and visible things would go on in the family under the worthy gentleman's nose, and he be never a penny the wiser. "Then," said the narrator, "Judith was summoned, and there was a scene. The upshot was that both the young ladies being of age, and having a right to go their own way, it seemed at first that each would certainly carry out her intention, in spite of her parents' remonstrances. But maturer reflection showed Sibyl, whose sisterly feelings run high. . . ."

"They don't hit it off?"

"Exactly! . . . showed Sibyl that if she made her own compliance with her parents' wishes contingent on Judith throwing up the play-acting. . . ."

"I see," said Marianne very perceptively; adding, as an underword, "There was the lord, too."

"It was what John Eldridge would have called a *wipe* for Judith. And, as you say, Lord Felixthorpe might have flinched at a stage sister-in-law."

"I didn't say so, but it was what I meant." An uncomfortable look comes on Marianne's face, as though

something had crossed her mind. She says disconnectedly, "Tite dear!"—with a new intonation out of place at this juncture, but immediately after cancels it. "Never mind!—at least, never mind now! Go on about Judith."

Challis glanced sharply at her, puzzled by her words and their manner. But he let them pass, and continued: "Anyhow, Judith has given up the stage, and there is to be no shop with 'Sibyl Limited' over it."

"What do you suppose you will do about the play?"

"I must leave it alone for a little, and see how matters shape themselves. You see, the play was written for Judith Arkroyd, and you can't think what a job it will be to think another identity—Silvia Berens, for instance—into the part. Or Thyrsa Shreckenbaum."

"I really *am* sorry for you, Titus. After writing things all over again and making alterations! Oh dear!" Marianne thought to herself, should she get up and go across the rug to her husband and kiss him? But then a memory must needs cross her mind—that story of the Ramsgate wedding—never cleared up! Till that was done, her rôle of domestic affection stopped short of gratuitous kissing. Some day she would get at that story, and know all about it.

Meanwhile matters were comfortabler; no doubt of it! That odious play-acting business was at an end—at least, so far as Judith, who was the vicious quitch in it, was concerned. Titus might have as much Silvia Berens as he liked; she knew *that* would be all safe. Also, Marianne misinterpreted her husband's visible reluctance to talk of Judith, at first, as an excusable disgust with the young lady herself for the trick she had played him. He had got to speak of her freely enough at last. This was because, as a matter of fact, his sense of his surrounding relations was growing on him, and each moment was feeling comfortabler than its predecessor.

Challis finished his pipe, and they chatted of other matters. Then followed a good deal about the railway accident, and Challis talked learnedly about the flash-points of petroleums. They seemed quite agreed that if it could only be established beyond a doubt that neither of them had ever seen or spoken to any one of the sufferers, or their relations or belongings, the calamity would come

within the category of common accidents in newspapers, that happen every day somewhere, and can't be helped. But Marianne was terribly afraid that the guard, who was burned nearly to a cinder, must be the red-nosed guard who looked in at her carriage in the morning and asked if she had dropped a pair of double eyeglasses. That would bring it painfully near home.

Mr. Eldridge's impulsiveness and some of his individualities were reviewed. It was impossible to acquit him of having given his friend a perfectly unnecessary fright; but we would not dwell on it, for look at the excellence of his heart! This quality was always saving John from censure, which would have been dealt out unsparingly to the possessor of a bad one. It is extraordinary what an affliction you can be to your friends, with impunity, when once your intrinsic goodness is an established fact.

Even grandmamma was pacifically talked over—a thing that happened rarely enough. Marianne had not been very long with her, as, while they were at lunch, the tooth-stopping came out, and she knew that if it was not replaced the tooth would come on aching. These interesting particulars came gradually, as Marianne brewed the promised toddy. Challis had declined to have it in bed, as quite uncalled for by his malady, which he maintained, truly enough, no doubt, was purely a nervous affection.

But he never drank that toddy!

For when it was ready, Marianne said: "It's so hot I can't touch it. You'll have to wait."

"All right," he said. "I shall be a few minutes yet. I dare say I'll have another half-pipe to make up three. Don't you stop, old girl!"

Marianne yawned. "Well, perhaps I may as well go. I've had a good deal of running about, and I'm sleepy. Good-night, dear; don't burn your mouth!" She was more her old self than she had been for a long time. For, you see, she had seen—but slowly—that her cloud had cleared away. Challis's own feeling that—for him—Judith must cease had worked itself into speech that his wife had merely supposed to relate to the *chute* of the projected drama. It was a good wind that blew Judith away, whatever quarter it blew from.

She went close to her husband, giving him the right piece of her face to kiss. "Which tooth was it?" said he. She showed him, tapping it. "It's a very little hole," he said, "and a good tooth!" She replied: "That's why Mr. Leaver says it should be stopped with gold. Now, good-night, dear! Drink the toddy, and don't be very late!"

Now, if only this woman had just gone straight away to bed and slept! And if that man, who had fully sworn to himself—mind you!—that the thing he had to do was to thrust his past delirium behind him, had but smoked his pipe, drunk his toddy, slept and waked next day a wiser man, might not the whole of the silly story have passed into oblivion, and left this prosy tale of ours without a *raison-d'être*? Quite possible! But, then, no such thing happened.

For Marianne seemed to hang fire and hesitate over her departure. She paused as she passed the open window; the sweet air, now that the rain had stopped, was pleasant after so much smoke. "What a beautiful moonlight night it's come out!" she said. But the moonlight grated on her husband. That moon was only a day older and a shade smaller than the full orb shining on the little Tophet garden and that Calypso of last night, robed in a stellar universe of moonsparks. Why need the rain-rack, flying northward after doing the garden so much good, leave conscious guilt exposed to the sight of Artemis—or Hecate—who knew all about it yesterday? Why not have gone on raining a little longer?

Marianne took another view. She said again, "How lovely the moon is, Tite!" in an unusual way for her. For she was not given to romantic sentiments. Her husband read in her manner a recognition of their *rapprochement*; for such it was, though no official recognition had been bestowed on distance, its condition precedent. He went and stood beside her; and, for her sake as well as his own—so he thought—gazed on the moon with all the effrontery of those experienced reprobates, Mr. Brown and Lord Smith. He forsook the toddy to do so, having just tried it with his fingers, and decided it could be touched with safety.



They stood side by side at the window ; a minute or more, maybe. Then she said, almost as though conscious of some unscheduled ratification : " That'll do, dear ! Now suppose I go to bed. The toddy will be cold." He followed her to the foot of the stairs, to endorse the cordiality of his send-off. There she kissed him again, but said, rather puzzling him : " I know you've forgiven me, Tite dear !"

He was moved as well as puzzled. " But, my dearest girl," said he, " what have I to forgive ?"

" What I said in my letter." Whatever this woman's faults were, she was always downright.

" But, dear old goose, what did it all come to ? You couldn't get away from home just now, or something. What did it matter ? *That* was all right !" Oh, how he wished he could have added, " Come next time " ! But, alas !—that was all over now ; reasons why jostled each other in his brain. No more Royd !

" I didn't mean that," says the downright one, pushing facts home. " I meant what I wrote at the end, on the back of the last sheet. It was all nonsense, you know ; I never meant it."

" I didn't see the back of the last sheet. I read it in a great hurry, just going in to dinner last night."

" Well !—it was there. Don't read it ; burn it ! Can't you get it now, and burn it for me to see ? I would so much rather."

Challis should have replied that he had got the letter safe somewhere, he knew, and he would look it up after he had finished his half-pipe. The reprobates the story has referred to would have done so ; would probably have gone the length of turning out their pockets, slapping themselves on those outworks ; would even have said, being men of spirit, Dammy, madam, the Devil was in it if they could tell what had become of the letter ! Come what might, they would have cut a figure ! Challis cut none, or if he did it was a poor one. The fact is that, considered as a liar, he was good for nothing—had a very low standard of mendacity ; and, indeed, had suffered so much over this affair of Judith that it was a luxury to him to say something, at last, without any reserves.

'It's burned already, Polly Anne. So you may be easy. Ta-ta!' He had said it before he remembered how unready he must perforce be with details.

"Oh!" rather curtly. "I suppose you lit your pipe with it? Very well!"

He had better have let misapprehension stand. Better that amount of false construction than the actual facts. But he must needs clear his character. "No, Polly Anne; it was really no fault of mine. It was the merest accident...." He stuttered over it; and she, seeing he had some tale to tell or reserve about it—but, to do her justice, without any idea of a lion in ambush—waited with patience. This, as you know, is the deadliest way in which stammered information can be received.

"It really was—you know how imp... difficult it is to read by moonlight—and my wax vesta I lit to read it with was the last I had. It was when I threw it away—ye, when I threw it away it set fire to the letter. It burned my fingers, and I threw it on the ground." What a lame business! And he dared not mention Judith, and knew it.

Marianne's voice is changing a little as she repeats: "It burned your fingers, and you threw it on the ground?" She does not use the words "Please explain!" aloud. She merely leaves them unspoken.

But her husband has only begun saying "Yes..." uneasily, when she cuts him short. "Were they dining by moonlight at Royd last night?"

"No—no—of course not! You don't understand...."

"I don't."

"I had read the letter myself just before dinner, and I missed reading the postscript, because it was late, and the dinner-gong sounded. This of the wax match was in the garden, after." It is coming slowly—the inevitable—and he is beginning to know it. Maybe Marianne sees the flush mounting on his face.

"I thought you never saw the back of the last sheet? Why did you want to read the rest again? Had I said anything wrong?"

"No, dear!—you don't understand. Listen...."

"Yes—go on!" Because what has to be listened to seems to hang fire. However, it comes in the end.

"It was not I myself that wanted to read the letter again just then..."

"Who had read it before?"

"I didn't mean that, either, dear—do wait!"

"I am waiting... tell me... tell me at once!" Surely Marianne's breath came a little short on the last words, and she is leaning on the banister-rail perceptibly. His answer comes in the quick undertone of one who wishes to get something said that he would have been glad to leave unuttered.

"I was asked if I thought you would mind your answer to their invitation being shown, and I could not remember a word in the letter that I thought you could possibly object to my showing..."

"Who do you mean by 'they'?"

"The—the family. Lady Arkroyd..."

"My message was to Judith Arkroyd, who wrote to me. Do you mean *her* when you say *they*? Who else was there when she saw the letter?"

"No one."

"You had better tell me exactly what happened."

"I had. They had a party, and dancing going on. I went away to a quiet garden there is, to be out of the noise, and Miss Arkroyd was there. She had seen your letter arrive for me when the post came, and had seen me after reading it just before dinner, and seen me slip it in my pocket. She asked to be allowed to see it—I know with some idea of inducing you to change your mind and come, and I... I may have been wrong, you know... only remember I had not read the postscript you speak of... well! I let her look at it."

"Then about the matches and the fire?"

"Just an accident. I held a match for her to read by, and it caught a gauze veil she had. It was just in time to save her a bad burning. But the letter caught in the blaze, and was burned before I could save it. That is all!"

"Is that quite all?"

"Quite all!"

"It is quite enough. Good-night!"

"Oh, Polly Anne, Polly Anne!—don't think—don't believe..."

"Go on. What!"

"... anything but what I've told you.... Oh, my dear!..."

But Marianne has left him, and is on her way upstairs. She is quite changed from the Polly Anne who was standing by the window but now. She walks stonily, and looks white. But her fortitude only lasts as far as the return of the staircase. As she turns, and knows that he can see her face from below, lighted as it is by the gas on the landing above, she breaks down altogether, and reaches her bedroom-door in a passion of hysterical tears.

"No—no—no—no!" she cries. "Take away your hands. Go away and leave me." For her husband has followed her, three steps at a time. He knows, and the knowledge is a knife in his heart, how wrong he has been; not in falling in love out of bounds—a thing he had no control over—but in showing that letter, which he could easily have refused to do. Passion and action live on opposite sides of the river. Now, what worlds would he give to find palliation for himself in his inner conscience!—it is the want of that that ties the tongue of his explanation to her. Yet he must qualify his contrition, if only that plenary admission of guilt would be taken to imply still more, and worse, to come.

"Polly Anne dearest, for God's sake don't run away with a false idea! A great deal too much is being made of a trifle. If you would only be patient with me!..."

"I am patient. Now tell—what is the false idea? Why is it too much? Why is it a trifle?—showing my letter to—to that woman before you had read it yourself!" She is killing her sobs as she speaks, and has a hard struggle. They are heads of a Lernean Hydra.

"Don't be unfair to me, dear! I *had* read it, all except that one bit on the back. It was so easy to miss it!"

"I never do—things on the back of letters."

"It was stupid of me. But what you don't understand, dear, is that I wanted Miss Arkroyd to read your message herself. There was certainly nothing you could have minded her seeing in the letter itself."

"Indeed! How do you know?"

"Well!—I don't know; I think."

"And when you had put Miss Arkroyd out, what happened?"

"How do you mean 'what happened'?"

"Oh, don't tell me if you don't like! I am out of it!"

Now, Challis would have liked to be able to say, "It is by your own choice that you are out of it; and the whole of this misunderstanding has grown, through a good intention of this lady you hate, to bring you into it." But he had tied his own tongue. "It"—whatever it was—had ceased to exist for him now at Royd. And probably his future intercourse with Grosvenor Square would be limited to just such an allowance of formal calls as would draw a veil over strained relations, and silence suggestion of ostracism. His behaviour of the previous evening had created a no-thoroughfare; but the conversation had hardly arrived at the notice-board.

"Nothing happened; the burns were not bad." His words were almost true—the prevarication, in this form, of the slightest, but the notice-board was clearly legible by now. "We left the garden, and no more was said about the letter, because some men from the house joined us, talking politics."

But Marianne has gone stony. Her manner rejects the men from the house, who talked politics. "I s-see," she says, fully expressing the closure of her mind against all extenuations, palliations, evasions, or excuses. "The letter was burned, and there was an end of it."

"Exactly! An end of it!" He extended the phrase in his mind to his relations with Royd, and all belonging to them.

Marianne waited so incisively for anything further to be said by her husband, and he felt so certain that if the no-thoroughfare notice were disregarded, the trespassers would suffer penalties—his own being enforced disclosure of what would be injurious to both, and quite useless—that he was almost glad when his wife said stonily: "Your whisky is getting cold. Perhaps you had better take it." He answered drearily, "Perhaps I had," and went away, but not to the dining-room. He went to his own study, and sat there aimlessly, thinking, in the half-dark. Presently, making as little noise as possible, he went down-

stairs, put out the lights that had been left burning and, going stealthily out at the front-door, went for a walk in the moonlight.

But that carefully mixed nightcap remained untouched, and was placed by Harmood on the sideboard, as an embarrassment difficult to dispose of where no man-servant was kept. And there it reproached its maker and its non-consumer in the morning.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

THERE are no hours more miserable than the first ones of a day after a quarrel, or high tension akin to a quarrel. Next morning at The Hermitage found it full of silences and reserves. Mr. and Mrs. Challis were speaking with studied forbearance—even civility—towards one another. The children had been told to make less noise, and had made it, but had then been told to make still less, and so on, to the point of virtual extinction. Their mother had risen at her usual time, but looking ill, and had scarcely found fault with her usual spirit. And yet Harmood, whose intuitions the story is now following, observed that the butter had a flavour—namely, the one it so often has; and the eggs were the sort that won't boil. There is another sort, which has a passion for disintegration; but this time it was the former, which 's worse; and yet they were accepted in silence. Harmood saw clearly that there had been words, and forthwith resolved to select this moment to give warning suddenly—a step she had been contemplating for some weeks. An up-to-date English servant respects herself more, or less, in proportion to the degree of confusion into which she can plunge her employers when she throws up her situation.

Mr. Challis had only waited—Harmood noticed—to see the children as they went out for an early walk, not to be in the hot sun too much. He kissed both affectionately, but his customary jokes with them were rather under his breath. He then went to his room, and presumably wrote something Harmood's inner consciousness was able to form a low opinion of, without perusal; for whenever she did out the study she mentally classed MS. literature as a lot of stuff.

Mrs. Challis transacted necessary household business, and went straight to her room, saying she was going out, and was not sure when she should be back. At the street-

door she was stopped by Harmood, respectfully but firmly. Was she likely to be back before twelve? She couldn't say; why? Of course, because Miss Harmood wished to give warning, and if she did not do so before midday, she would have to pass twenty-four hours more under the roof that had sheltered her for three years at least. As Mrs. Challis might be out she would prefer to give a month's warning forthwith.

Mrs. Challis did not show the panic Harmood had promised herself the sight of. On the contrary, she barely raised her eyebrows as she answered: "Certainly, Harmood! To-day is the twentieth," and was actually going out. But she paused an instant at a prefatory cough from the handmaiden. Had the latter any complaint to make? The answer renounced complaint, but with implication of generosity. "Very well!" said Mrs. Challis thereon. "I can't wait. The twentieth." And went away, leaving Harmood mortified.

She came back between twelve and one. She was heated with walking, but might have been crying, too. So Harmood thought when she let her in. She went upstairs, speaking to her husband outside his door. She had just come back from Charlotte's, she said. Was he there? Yes—he was, and came out at once to speak with her. He was amiable, but subdued. Had waited for her, in case there was anything—a vague expression, but conciliatory under the circumstances. There was certainly nothing—no doubt about it. Was he going out?—his coat suggested it. Yes; he would not be in to lunch. A letter had come by the second post, asking him to meet a man on business in the City at two. He would lunch at Scallopini's, and stay at his club, where he had promised to dine with his publisher and some authors at 7.30. But he would not come in late.

Then Marianne said coldly: "Don't hurry on my account."

He answered, as cheerfully as he dared—that is, not to seem to ignore the conditions: "You'll go to bed just the same, of course?"

Her reply was: "I shall go to bed." Nothing more. She went on to her own bedroom.

Challis could almost have sworn he heard a sob as the



door closed. Was it so or not? He could not bear the doubt. He would risk it—go to her, throw himself at her feet, cry out in his misery for pardon for the past, and oblivion; for a pact of hope for the days and hours to come. If he could only have made his decision a few seconds sooner! But he just missed the chance, as Marianne opened her door and came back, stony.

"I forgot to tell you. Harmood has given warning."

"Harmood! Why—what on earth has the woman to complain of?"

"I can't say. I have given her no cause of complaint. She makes no complaint, as I understand."

"Well!—that is extraordinary! However, she's not indispensable. We can do without her. Only you'll have such a bother to find some one else."

Marianne said: "I don't think I shall." And Challis imagined that she referred to some possible servant or useful agency that she knew of. But the thought in her mind was different, as we shall see. Challis recalled her words afterwards. All that this talk of Harmood meant for him then was that a good impulse had been spoiled by it.

He looked at his watch, and found he would only just have time to get to town, get some lunch, and be ready for his appointment, which was an imperative one. He changed slippers for boots, and was ready. With his hand on the open street-door, he called out to his wife: "Good-bye, then! I'm off." Contrary to his expectation, she came downstairs.

"You are off," she said, repeating his words. "Good-bye, then!" And rather to his surprise she kissed him, saying: "Yes—then, good-bye!" All the manner of it was a little odd. But his instinct—instincts may be mistaken ones—told him to let well alone. He replied with a warmer kiss than hers had been, and a moment after was on his way to East Putney Station. He was very uncomfortable about losing sight of her for so long. But, after all, it might give their relations a better chance of readjustment. Nothing like a pause!

A business colloquy of some warmth, with a reference to possible legal proceedings, was followed first by a pleasant

afternoon at the Club, and next by a very informal dinner of six—of whom at least three were amusing dogs—and lastly by a saunter homewards with one of the amusing dogs, who wished him good-night at Gloucester Road Station. All these experiences were of the sort that brushes cobwebs from the mind, and Challis was feeling much freer at heart when, after midnight, his latchkey clicked in the front-door at The Hermitage, and admitted him to a silent house.

Well!—of course, a house is silent when everyone has gone to bed. What would you have?

Challis lighted his candle and gathered up his letters to read in his study. He went furtively up the two short stair-flights, secretly hoping that Marianne would speak from her room to him; for, however quiet he was, she almost always heard him, the exceptions being when he was unusually late, and she very sound asleep. He paused a moment to favour the chance. Not a sound!

He glanced at her door with an uncomfortable feeling he could not at first account for, a sense that it disclaimed an inmate. In a moment, however, he mastered the reason of that. Nothing so very unusual! Only that she had forgotten to put her boots out. Well!—this wasn't a hotel. How absurdly nervous he was, and fanciful!

He turned into his study and lighted his reading-candle, with the reflector. He would be there some time; there were so many letters. First he would open the window, though, to let the sweet night-air in. It was so overpoweringly hot.

Then he sat down to his desk and began upon his letters. One advertisement of no value. Two advertisements of no value. A thick letter from Nebraska to the author of his own first work, etc., etc., care of his publisher; that might be amusing. An enclosure of slip-cuttings; so might that.... Hullo!—what was the meaning of this? One to Mrs. Alfred Challis among his letters! Marianne had overlooked it. Odd, that!

But—but—but, that was not all! Another, and another to Mrs. Alfred Challis. Overlooked?—*impossible!* Utterly impossible! She must be still out. Where could she have gone? Did not she say she had been at

Charlotte's in the morning? Where else could she go? Where else was there to go? Tulse Hill? Why—she was there yesterday!

He sat there a full two minutes, without dropping the letter he held when the thing amiss first caught him, or changing his posture of face or hand. He sat pursuing possibilities in thought, and overtaking none. Then, with sudden resolution in a face white as the envelope he dropped, he rose and went straight to his wife's room, lamp in hand. On the way a thought came—it was just a bare chance!—had she gone to bed early with a headache, saying she was not to be disturbed?—and had all these letters come by the last post? Not probable, certainly, but not impossible! At least, he would knock at her door before going in and waking her suddenly. She would be less surprised.

He tapped and heard nothing. He listened longer than need was, clinging artificially to hope. Then he opened the door and went in. There was no one in the room.

Was there nothing that would give him a clue at once? He could not think coolly yet; utterly useless with this nervous ague-fit on him! He knew it would subside in time, and he would be able to think. But for now, was there nothing?

For instance, in the appearance of the bed? Yes—something! Surely his recollection did not deceive him. Should not the bed, by rights, be “turned down,” and be yawning, as it were, for its occupant? Would there not be, normally, some appearance of night-clothes; if not laid out on the coverlid as though courting their contents, at least beneath the pillow? He threw it aside; there was nothing.

On the dressing-table, then? Yes!—the brushes and combs were not there. They might be in the drawer, though. But how about those stoppered bottles? One was clear in his memory—square, with horizontal corrugations and a flat disc with a statement, hazarded by a writer in gold, that it contained eau-de-Cologne. Where was it? Not on that table, nor the chimney-piece. A great fear was on him that she had *gone*! Then it flashed upon him that if she had, she would have taken

her jewels with her. Where did she keep them? In the top wardrobe-drawer. It would be locked, but he and she had a secret knowledge that one key opened all the drawers alike. He felt like an over-sensitive detective; but he got the key and opened it. The jewel-case was there, sure enough, but—not locked! He opened it, and saw at a glance that none of her favourites were there. Oh yes—she had gone! Marianne was gone—there was no doubt of it now!

He dropped back, feeling sick, on a chair, face to face with reality. Event agrees ill with men of Challis's temperament, the sort that can become unhealthily excited by the puppets of their own imagination. That railway accident yesterday was bad enough! But this—think of it!—at home, with the children to tell in the morning!

He tried to think—what next? Rouse the servants? Of course; but which servant? Nurse by preference, certainly. *Procul absit* Steptoe, and even Miss Harmood! He rose, feeling weak; and without his lamp, for all the house was navigable in the glorious moonlight, found his way to the nursery. Nurse slept in the little room just off it on the landing. But the rooms had a door between, in case of anything in the night. That is nurse's phrase, not ours.

Just as Challis was framing in his mind the question he should ask—and all forms that suggested themselves seemed to intensify the position—the thought crossed his mind that it would be a relief to see those youngsters asleep in the moonlight. Surely it would!—or, would it? He would risk it. He opened the nursery-door furtively, and stole in. But darkness reigned—curtain-darkness; shutter-darkness. Challis knew that little girls that sleep exposed to moonbeams suffer in some mysterious way—go blind, or go silly, or are witched away by bogles. He wasn't sure which. He tiptoed to the window, and could let in the light without noise, for, as it turned out, there was no shutter. What of the bed? He knew how nice they were in bed. All children are.

But the bed was empty.

\* \* \* \* \*

Mrs. Steptoe, roused from her first sleep, which was about two hours old, and a promising sample, thought at first that she was back in Tallack Street, and that the noise was her lamented husband, the worse for liquor. Further revived, her decision that it might be thieves, and that her choice of action would lie between affecting sleep and calling "Police!" from the window, was short-lived; and she followed it up by referring her master's cries to fire. Harmood's consciousness passed through analogous phases, but with this difference: that the second one did not suggest immediate action. A servant who had just given warning might surely go on pretending to be asleep, unblamed. Was she there at all, technically?

However, the thought of the great terror "Fire!" brings the laziest from his bed. Neither waited to be sure that she was being called by name, but ran out on the landing above, belonging to the attics, to be encountered by Challis's voice from below, shouting madly, "What has become of your mistress? Where are the children? Where on earth are you all? Come down at once!" and so on.

Mrs. Steptoe's tremulous accents stopped him, but he could not catch what she said. "Come down here at once," he cried again, "and speak up plain. Where is your mistress, and the children?" He just got his voice under control for the question.

Mrs. Steptoe came down half-way. Her costume forbade a complete descent. "The mistress and the young ladies and nurse, sir?"

"Yes!—the mistress and the young ladies and nurse. Where are they? Speak quick!"

Mrs. Steptoe found voice enough to say: "Ain't they at Tulse Hill, sir?"

"That's what I want to know. Do you know?"

Mrs. Steptoe found some more voice. "Didn't the mistress say Tulse Hill, Harmood?" She asked the question of the unseen, above, not without recognition of her own necessity as a go-between. Direct communications from a house-and-parlour-maid, single, in a nightgown, could hardly be in order under the circumstances.

"Mrs. Challis said Tulse Hill, Mrs. Steptoe." The

delicacy of the position is recognised, and the intercessor and mediator installed. Who repeats the words officially, and adds, as a mere human creature : " My word a mercy, what a turn it giv' ! "

" What did your mistress say ? When did she go ? Did she leave no message ? "

" Not with me, sir ! " Then officially : " Did Mrs. Challis leave no message, Harmood ? " Which, substituting as it does a name for an offensive designation, confirms and ratifies the claim to mediumship made by the speaker, who accordingly repeats the substance of Miss Harmood's communication from above, replacing the offensive designation in the text where it had been ignored in the original.

" The mistress didn't leave no message, sir, only a note. She was taking the young ladies to their grand-mamma's, and we was not to expect her back. "

" Where's the note ? . . . Did she name any time ? " To this Miss Harmood, overstepping delicacy, and speaking, as it were, with the direct voice, replies :

" Mrs. Challis said no time, sir, but you would know. She took her things to stay, and the young ladies, and went about three. "

" About three. " Mrs. Steptoe confirms, adding : " The note is left on the ' all-table. " This anticipates the question on Challis's lips, and also reinstates delicacy, making further direct communication unnecessary.

Challis says abruptly, " You had better get back to bed, both of you ! " and goes to bring the lamp from the bedroom. He sees at once that he had overlooked the letter, which must have been at the bottom of the handful he brought up. Of course, it would be, if it was written before three. All those later letters would have hidden it.

Yes—there it was, directed to " Mr. Challis " and nothing else. He brought to the surface a memory of having noticed it at first, and thought it a tradesman's account or a begging application. Now he could see the handwriting. He could not have said whether he was more anxious or afraid to open it. Perhaps the former, so great was his wish to know how it would begin. But it had no definite beginning, such as letters usually have.

"You do not really care for me, so I have made up my mind to leave you—it is all at an end between us, for you *do not really care for me*—now you can go away to Miss Arkroyd if *she will have you*—it will not be bigamy, and you know why—I am Kate's sister, and we cannot be legally Man and Wife—mamma has said so all along.

"Oh, Titus, how could you show that letter—could I have acted by you like that?—to show it to that woman to read before you—think if it had been me—my letter showed to *some gentleman* you half knew, and *me not seen it first*—oh, Titus—but it is good-bye.

"Besides, I know, because of the garden all by yourselves—Charlotte says so."

Challis started to his feet as he read these words. "I knew it—I knew it!" he cried to the empty air. "Oh, damn that woman!—with all my heart and soul, damn that woman!" He added, without circumlocution, words to the effect that if ever a woman of infamous character existed, she was one. It seemed to soothe him; and after pacing the room once or twice with the letter in his hand, he came back to the lamp, and went on reading:

"Charlotte says so—only it is only the *sort of thing* I mean—I have *no accusation to make*—you must believe what I say—it is what *I know you feel* I go by—and I think *most women would, too*. If you had cared for me you *COULD* not have done it, but though you have behaved so to me I shall try to forgive you, though I have quite made up my mind that we must part.

"Dear Titus, I know I have often been short-tempered, but that is another thing—now good-bye.

"Affectly. yours,

"MARIANNE CRAIK."

The name was on the fourth line of the last page, though a postscript followed. Challis broke out impatiently into a sort of painful half-laugh, as his eye caught his wife's maiden name. "What folly!" cried he. "What sheer, unqualified folly! Polly Anne!—just fancy! Why—she is my wife: nothing can make her anything else." And then he went on to the postscript.

"POSTSCRIPT.—I have taken away the children, because they are my own. You can ask Mr. Tillingfleet—because he told me—I suppose a lawyer knows——" Here the writing turned sideways, running up the paper-edge: "It is no use your coming to see me—my mind is made up." Then a further continuation, rather illegible on the paper-edge, Challis made out to be: "I will not say, God forgive you, because you do not believe in God."

Challis sat still after reading this, becoming calmer, and thinking. At last he said: "It's all nonsense! Polly Anne will come back fast enough when I've got the kids back. She can't keep *them*." He seemed quite satisfied of it.

He thought he should not sleep if he went to bed. But he did both, and was a sad man in an empty house when he awoke late from a happy oblivion, and slow remembrance

~~came~~



## CHAPTER XXXVII

'WILL Mrs. Challis be back to lunch, sir?' Thus Harmood the respectful, after giving a certain amount of attention to a series of concessions, collectively called breakfast. Her mistress being absent, she was taking advantage of Challis's readiness to submit to anything rather than attend to the domesticities. Just like his fellow-males elsewhere! She was fortified in the adoption of this course by the reflection that she had given warning. And a servant who has given warning is a problem not to be solved under the most subtle definition of Existence yet formulated, even by Graubosch. She is not an Abstract Idea; would not the butcher's bill diminish in that case? On the other hand, could any concrete thing, worthy of the name, do so much in the way of leaving coal-scuttles at stair-feet, or its black-leadin' brush in the empty grate; or its dust-pan full of tea-leaves for when it should be ready to begin sweeping; or the windows flaring wide open, and the door, and all master's papers blowing about?

The story can't settle that point now, nor could Challis. It was metaphysics, and Mr. Brownrigg's business. All the victim of Harmood's qualified entity could distinguish was, for instance, that the table-cloth was grudgingly disposed so as to cover one-third of the table only. Being a tablecloth of huge bulk, with a court-train at each corner, it refused, when quadrupled, to have anything stood on without tumbling over; notably a needlessly small milk-jug, evolved from some obscure corner to stint master in milk with. It wouldn't stand only you held it; so, of course, it just slopped over. But, of course, there was plenty of milk in the house, and the incident closed with Harmood actually bringing The Milk itself, in the most matronly white jug that ever was seen, that seemed to have thrown its whole soul into stability, like Noah's

wife in his Ark, who can be stood up on a rough carpet cattle fall sideways on, knocking down their neighbours.

Need it be said that Challis's observation is followed in all this? It shows a state of mind not fully alive to the reality of his position. He was, in fact, pooh-poohing the idea that Marianne's action was more than an outburst of ill-temper, the result—he admitted this—of a perfectly natural resentment under the circumstances. Of an unjust one—yes! He said this to himself again and again, but never exactly located the injustice. He could perceive that this resentment was due to gross misapprehension of the facts of the case, but he cautiously avoided details of the misapprehension. He may have felt misgivings that Marianne was not so very wrong, after all. Women can decide this; no man's verdict has any weight in such a matter.

He attached a certain value to Harmood's concessions of warmed-up coffee, and eggs which were a caution to poachers. He took no advantage of them, or very little, as breakfast; but till they were finally left to perish of cold neglect, he could postpone his answer to the question, "What's to be done next?" However, it would have to be answered some time. A cigar in the garden would help. There is nothing like a cigar after breakfast to clear one's head. But first he must answer that question of Harmood's. *Would Mrs. Challis and the young ladies be back to lunch?*

"Just ask Mrs. Steptoe again *exactly* what your mistress said." Challis takes a pleasure in rubbing in the obnoxious expression. Harmood's conduct has been detestable. But she is conscious, from Mr. Challis's manner, of her success. From Mrs. Challis's she had been able to form no opinion.

Mrs. Steptoe testified from the basement, and Harmood returned. No—Mrs. Challis had said nothing but what had been reported last night. She was taking the young ladies to their grandma's, and we was not to expect her back.

"Back to lunch, or *what?*" Challis raises his voice over the question, and Harmood refers to her authority, with an air of indifference to trifles of this sort. Bald confirmation comes of the wording of the message; no interpretation.

"Very well, then! Your mistress didn't say she *wasn't* coming to lunch. Of course she *is* coming to lunch." Challis repulsed an attempt of Mrs. Steptoe to entangle him in the problem of how some abhorrent remainders from the larder—which she offered to show—might be best utilised, and got away to that cigar in the garden, to think. . . .

Damn interruptions!—no, he couldn't see anybody. . . . Stop! who was it? Miss Harmood, who had not been explicit enough, now testified to Mr. Eldridge; whereupon Challis asked her why she couldn't say so at first? This was unjust and irrational; but Miss Harmood had given warning, and felt partly disembodied. What did it matter to her?

It was John Eldridge, not very intelligible, but in much perturbation at something. "Well—you see!—it was Lotty's idea he should come round. Never would have entered his head himself! No sayin', though!" This was a favourite expression of his, presenting him as a sage prone to suspension of opinion, and open-minded.

After using it once or twice, he used his pocket-handkerchief, causing Harmood to inquire whether Mr. Challis had called. He then stood over the object of his visit, whatever it was, to ask, as an entirely new idea, "How are you yourself, Master Titus?"

"I'm all right, John. Won't you smoke?—that one at the end's very mild." But Mr. Eldridge wouldn't smoke; it was too early in the morning. Besides, he was late at the office. Challis avoided analysis and comparison, and made essays towards explanation of the visit. "Any more railway accidents?" said he.

"Wasn't that the day before yesterday?" Mr. Eldridge stopped polishing his nose to ask this. Challis explained that it was quite recent enough—he was in no hurry for more. He chose to suggest that the question, which had absolutely no meaning whatever, was intended to impute to him an unnatural lust for railway accidents. Mr. Eldridge seemed at a loss, saying: "Now you're poking fun, Master Titus! None of your larks!" Then he muttered to himself, "Thought so—thought so—day before yesterday!"

It was evidently going to be a matter of patience. Challis knew why his visitor had come, of course, but he was not going to supply him with guidance. Perhaps it would be quickest and simplest to leave him entirely alone. Then he would have to burst, or go. He chose the former, after some vague soliloquy about not having inquests on Sundays.

"You don't object to my lookin' round to speak about it, Master Titus?"

"Not a bit, John! Please speak. What is it?"

A gentle reproachfulness was on Mr. Eldridge as he answered: "No—come, I say, now—no gammon, suppose!" And Challis really commiserated him. What a position to be in! To be sent round by your wife, in the legitimate exercise of her omnipotence, to lecture a neighbour believed to be involved in a quarrel with his! And that, too, when you happen to have, from no fault of your own, but from predestination, a short supply of words, and defective powers of construction. Challis appreciated the position quite clearly, and decided to be good-natured. After all, it was that detestable meddling Charlotte, not her booby husband himself—most probably—that had organized this expedition into his territory.

"All right, John!" said he. "No gammon, suppose! I know what you want to speak about. Marianne."

"Well, you know!" says John ruefully, "my idear was Charlotte should come herself. Much better idear!"

"What for? Very happy to see her, of course!"

"Well, you know, Master Titus, that's just what I keep on sayin' to Charlotte, that it's no concern of either of ours."

"Sharp chap!" This is interjected privately. So far as it reaches the audience, it seems to be accepted as laurels. "Now, suppose you and Charlotte were to take a holiday, and just leave me and Marianne to fight it out our own way. We shan't quarrel."

Mr. Eldridge became snugly confidential. "There, now, Master Titus, isn't that exactly what I said to Lotty? The very words! 'You leave them to fry their own fish,' I said." Challis thought of his philosophical friends at

Royd; here was a new definition of identity wanted! " 'You leave them to fry their own fish.' It's what I've been sayin' all along. But when females get an idea, you may just talk to 'em. Nothin' comes of it. . . ."

"What was her idea?"

"Me to come and talk it over in a friendly sort of way. Try to pave the way to a good understanding. . . . Lots of expressions she used! . . ." He paused to recall some. " . . . Oh ah!—I remember. . . 'painful misunderstanding'—that was one. And 'tact and delicacy.' She's a clever woman, Lotty, that's a fact, Master Titus."

"Devilish clever, John! Everyone knows that. 'Tact and delicacy' is a capital expression. It reminds me of Mrs. Chapone, but I don't know why." John seemed flattered, and Challis continued, with some disposition to laugh outright: "Look here, old chap! You and that clever lady of yours may just as well be easy. You think Polly Anne and I have quarrelled. But we haven't. And we shan't. I tell you, the thing's out of the question. Sheer nonsense!"

Mr. Eldridge's idea of identity comes to the fore again. "Just what I said—'reg'lar tommy rot.' Mrs. J. E., she agreed with me, down to the ground. There was another expression she used, now! . . . what the dickens was it? . . . Oh, I know!—no, I don't. . . . Oh yes!—'parties God had joined together let no man put asunder.' Nice feelin' about that!"

"Well!—no man's going to put anyone asunder this time, whether God united them or the Devil. Don't you go and repeat that remark to Mrs. J. E., John."

"No—no, Master Titus! Never say anything—never say a word!—that's the rule. Never say the Devil—never say God; not before females. Keep 'em snug! Good behaviour's paramount—can't be too particular! Expression of my wife's. . . . I say, I must be runnin'."

"They'll be sending for you from the Office if you don't." Then, as his visitor was departing by the front gate, he called to him from the house-steps: "Sorry the missis and the kids aren't back. They went to Tulse Hill yesterday. I'm going down there presently, only I've some work to finish first." And Harmood overheard, and con-

demned her employer for his contradictory testimony. "'Ark at him lying!'" was the candid form her censure took. Mrs. Steptoe, saying a word in arrest of judgment, for the pleasure of gainsaying Harmood, was met by "Now, didn't he say, only this minute, Mrs. Challis would be back to lunch?"

The question whether, when Mr. Challis remained to lunch at home, as though he expected his wife's return, and immediately after took his departure for Tulse Hill, he had not reconciled his apparently conflicting statements, formed the subject of intemperate controversy between Harmood and Mrs. Steptoe during the remainder of the afternoon.

No doubt Challis had treasured a hope in his heart that his wife and the children would reappear. He succeeded, to his own satisfaction, in pretending he had known they wouldn't, all along; and by the time he had reached Tulse Hill Station, believed he had only remained to lunch at Wimbledon to write important letters.

He rang more than once—two or three times more—at his mother-in-law's, without any response. The first time some one, he thought, looked from behind the blind of an upper window; and then two voices, one dictatorial, the other compliant, conversed up and down the staircase of Glenvairloch, for that was the name of Marianne's mother's villa at Tulse Hill. The next-door neighbour lived at Bannochar.

At his second ring he suspected, at his third was convinced, that non-admission was a *parti pris*, in his case, at Glenvairloch. The dictatorial voice had been, not Marianne's, but her parent's, who, probably, had also been the scout at the window. If the household had made up its mind not to admit him, what could he do? A scheme for burglarious entry, suggested by a boy at large, in the hope of reward, did not recommend itself. Even this boy asking the cook next door to let him through, and him to climb through a back-winder, seemed a lawless course to Challis's mind. He found, too, that this boy caused the sudden appearance from space of other boys, and that as they agglutinated round him, passers-by, apparently

*crétins*, wanted to know whether it was a fire. He saw no alternative but to give it up. He did so, resolving to return next day. As it chanced, some pressing appointments made the day after more convenient.

This time he went early in the morning, hoping to effect a surprise. But he knew quite well that if no one else came to the door whose admission was *de rigueur*, he was practically at the mercy of the garrison. No portcullis need be lifted unless it chose.

A lucky chance befell, in the shape of a butcher-boy, who could not well leave a pound of steak impaled on the gate rails, nor slip three ounces of dripping into the letter-box. Taken into confidence by Challis, he said: "They'll come along for me, you bet." He knew his power, this butcher-boy; but he yelled as well as rang, from sweetness of disposition, although not bound to yell by contract. Indeed, he also shouted an exhortation: "Git them stockin's on, Hemmer, and come along! Can't wait here till Sunday!"

But Emma was really up and dressed, for it was past three o'clock. She took in the meat, and said she would ask, please, if Mrs. Challis was in. Challis raised no objection, but walked into the house beside her, for all that. You see, he was one of the family, however seldom he visited his mother-in-law. And it does not come into practice for a young servant to repulse an applicant for admission; under such circumstances, Emma had admitted Mr. Challis more than once. How could she turn on him and say, "You're not to come in this time"?

He had never been a frequent visitor at the house, though always nominally—or we might say technically—welcome. There had been little open warfare between him and its occupant since his first widowerhood, when his scanty attendances at Divine Service, conceded during his short period of married life, to keep the peace, were discontinued altogether. His perdition had then become an article of the old lady's faith; but she seemed to have decided that the Fires of Hell during the remainder of Eternity would be a sufficient penalty for her son-in-law's delinquencies, without the added sting of incivility from herself when he occasionally found himself under her roof. Moreover, Challis had made a great concession in sur-

rendering Bob to Marianne. His way of describing this surrender of his son was shockingly blasphemous; in fact, he used to indulge in parallels founded on recollections of his own short church-going experience in a way that would have estranged his second wife and her mother forever from him had their information on the details of their own faith been equal to their conviction that they held it. As it was, the impression sometimes produced on their minds by Challis's irreverent whimsicalities was that there must be the raw material of Salvation somewhere in a person capable of repeating so many correct religious phrases. The story only dwells on these things now because Challis did so as he sat waiting for the appearance of his mother-in-law, and wondering what form her indignation would take.

He had just recollected an occasion when, after a visit to the old lady, he had said to his wife: "Really, Polly Anne, I think I produced quite a devout impression on grandmamma to-day," and her unsuspecting reply, "I thought you spoke very nicely, dear!" when the old lady herself became audible in the lobby without, mixing an asthmatic cough with reprimands to the servant.

"You *gurls*!" The speaker seemed for a moment almost paralysed by the force of her indignation against the class she denounced. Then it burst forth in almost a shout—"WHY couldn't-you-do-as-I-told-you-and-say-your-orders-were...?" and so on. But the very vehemence of the fusillade that followed the artillery was suicidal, for the cough cut short what might almost have been printed as a continuous word. Then speech got a turn again, on a revised line, "Why-can't-you-do-as-you're-TOLD?" the gunshot coming this time as a wind-up. Variations followed, to the same effect.

Emma the gurl seemed of a timid and sensitive nature, prone to dissolve in sobs and sniffs. Her defence, Challis gathered, was that he had walked in through the kitchen-door, and that her troops were outflanked by such an unusual move. He felt the defence was good, and that he ought to help. He showed himself at the room-door.

"Don't scold Emma, grandmamma," said he. "It was no fault of hers. If she had given me your message fifty



times over, I should have come in just the same. Where's Marianne?"

"Be good enough not to interfere between me and my servants." She had a proper spirit, this old lady, and it was shown at intervals—short ones. As she mellowed with age, these intervals grew shorter.

"Well!—blow Emma up if you like, but it was no fault of hers. Where's Marianne?"

"Will you have the goodness to wait till I have done with this *gurl*?"

Challis returned into the drawing-room, and waited. Emma—he said to himself—was catching it hot. He felt in his pocket to make sure of half-a-crown, as a *solatium*, in case Emma showed him out.

Nothing lasts for ever. "Such a thing again, and you go!" was the last shot from the old lady's citadel at the servant. And her first at himself was, "Now *you*!" He accepted the challenge.

"Where is Marianne?" But an attack of coughing stopped the old woman's reply; and when it subsided, and left him free to repeat his question, he re-worded it, "Where is my wife?"

"My daughter is *not* your wife."

"Very well, grandmamma, let's pretend she isn't. Where is your daughter? Where's Marianne?"

"What do you want with her?" The speech and the speaker are sullen, dogged, and in deadly earnest. If Challis plays any impish tricks—and he isn't taking the old cat seriously; witness that malicious twinkle in his eye!—there will be an explosion, and a bad one.

"What do I want with her? Why, of course, to come back and live in Sin with me, like a dutiful wife. Stop a bit, though, grandmamma! Perhaps you don't know about Marianne's letter—the letter she left for me when she bolted off yesterday? Do you, or don't you?"

"I refuse to be catechized. I am in my daughter's confidence, and I know exactly what she has written and what she has not written." The suggestion was that Challis's report would be untrustworthy. She seemed to warm to her subject. "Marianne has told me *everything*, and she has my fullest concurrence in the step she has taken."

"Then I suppose," says Challis, with irritation, for the old lady's fangs are beginning to tell, "that you are giving your 'fullest concurrence' to her carrying away my children?"

The inverted commas in Challis's voice are caught at. "Yes—you may sneer, and you may repeat my words! You may despise me, Mr. Alfred Challis, because I am only an old woman. But I tell you this, and you can believe it or not, as you like—that in the eyes of Holy Writ those children are *not* yours, and any lawyer will tell you they are not yours."

"I don't see how more than one lawyer can vouch personally for the paternity of either of the kids."

"I don't understand you."

"Never mind! Try to understand this, and tell my wife: that whether the children are mine or anyone else's—even the most respectable legal firm's in the City!—they are *legally* mine, and I intend to have them back."

"You know as well as I do that they are *not* legally yours. You know as well as I do that when you married Kate's sister you were committing an act forbidden in Holy Writ, and expressly condemned by Our Lord Himself. You know that your children are illegitimate children, and contrary to the Act of Parliament. Do not pretend you are ignorant of this, Alfred Challis. Be truthful for once!"

"I suppose my copy of the Bible isn't a recent edition; I must get one brought up to date. Or I might order one from the *Times* Book Club.... Oh no!—no doubt all you say is correct. I shall find the passage." A misunderstanding occurred here, owing to the old lady's deafness. An image generated in her mind had to be dispensed, of a Club of Freethinkers who had a copy of the Scriptures, certainly, but kept it in the passage, reserving the library shelves for Mock Litanies and the like. Challis's tendency to regard the whole thing as a joke revived somewhat over this. "No, no, grandmamma," said he, with something like a laugh; "no one has had anything to say against the Book Club, so far, on the score of Unsoundness. You misunderstood me. All I meant to say was that my recollections of Holy Writ seem to want polishing up. No—

doubt you're right! But the notion of Marianne having any right to appropriate *my* children—*our* children—why, the idea is simply too ridiculous to bear speaking of!"

"You can ask any lawyer."

"What lawyer ever told you such rubbish?"

"Mr. Tillingfleet."

"Mr. Tillingfleet deserves to be struck off the Rolls. When did Mr. Tillingfleet make this precious statement?"

"I suppose you fancy you know better than Mr. Tillingfleet?"

"When did he tell you this?"

"I can show you his letter if you like." Letter produced. Challis muttered that *he* didn't want to see it. But he took it, and made a visible parade of superficial reading, until he came to the end, when he appeared to re-read the last paragraph. He then went back, and re-read from the beginning, half aloud, skipping words.

"Dear Madam reply to your esteemed... hm-hm... regret must repeat advice... *re* matrimonial status... hm-hm... in no case can marriage of man with deceased wife's sister hold good in law, however pledged parties hold themselves... hm-hm... consequently legal dissolution impossible no legal contract existing... old friend of late Mr. Craik... excuse... delicate position... your daughter... counsel moderation... jealousy may be justified... may be groundless...' Sensible chap. Tillingfleet!"

The widow of the late Mr. Craik snorted. "He was my husband's legal adviser," said she. How could he be other than a sensible chap?—said the snort. "Perhaps you will be kind enough to give your attention to what he says about Marianne's children."

"About our children, certainly!" Challis continued, reading more distinctly. "'With regard to your other question as to the relative claims of your son-in-law and daughter to the guardianship of their children, I am personally of opinion that as no legal marriage exists, the children are technically illegitimate, and this technical illegitimacy would bar any claim to guardianship on the part of Mr. Challis. How far any claim for maintenance could be sustained is another question, Mrs. Challis's object being, as I understand, to withdraw the children entirely

from their father. On the justifiability of such a course I do not understand that my opinion is asked.' Sensible fellow, Tillingfleet!" said the reader. But with so plain a meaning that his hearer caught him up sharply.

"What do you mean to imply?"

"That Mr. Tillingfleet thinks you and Marianne a couple of fools. He all but says that your behaviour is unjustifiable in his opinion. . . ."

"His opinion was not asked."

"So he says. Hadn't you better ask him?"

"Certainly not. He does not know how you have behaved to your wife. It is a matter of which she alone can judge."

"How have I behaved to my wife?"

"You know, as well as I do."

"No doubt, and a great deal better. But you don't know as well as I do."

"I do not wish to talk any further. Have you anything further to say?"

"I wish to see Marianne and the children, and to know when they are coming home."

"I am here to speak for Marianne. She refuses to see you, or to give up her children to you. You will gain nothing by remaining here."

"Come, grandmamma, do be a little Christian-like, and help to make things comfortable again. . . ."

"Christian-like indeed! What next?"

"Perhaps I used the wrong word. Couldn't you manage a little Heathenism for once, and be jolly? At any rate, grandmamma, tell me what the accusation is. The worst criminals are allowed to hear the indictment." Challis was just a shade uncandid in this, because he believed he knew the worst of the indictment. But he excused his conscience on the score of his right to any means of finding out whether his character, sadly soiled by that unfortunate letter business, had not been well smudged over with soot by Mrs. Eldridge into the bargain.

This conversation will have shown that grandmamma, though she had achieved a narrow-mindedness of a very choice quality, while preserving a virgin ignorance of the meaning of the popular teaching, or perversion of teaching,

by which vernacular bigotries are usually fostered and nourished, was by no means a stupid person when she had an end to gain. Whether her end in the present case was the final separation of Marianne from her husband may be questioned. A working hypothesis of her motives might be that she merely wished to pay her son-in-law out for the slights he was always heaping—as she knew, while she could not understand or answer them—on her cherished booth in Vanity Fair. Whatever her ultimate object, she was unable to resist the opportunity of hitting hard that the culprit's application to hear the indictment afforded her.

"What the accusation is!" she echoed derisively. "Ask your Miss Judith what the accusation is. Ask *her*, and then look me in the face, Mr. Alfred Challis!" The old lady seemed quite vain of this formula of denunciation, for she picked up the missile and reloaded her arbalist. "Ask your fashionable friends—oh yes!—they look the other way, no doubt, but they have eyes in their heads, and can see for all that. Ask *them*, and *then* look me in the face, Mr. Alfred Challis! Ask your neighbours. . . ."

"Mrs. Charlotte Eldridge?" asked Challis sharply.

"No, Alfred Challis!—not Mrs. Charlotte Eldridge only, but *all* the neighbours—ask *them all*! Ask them to say what *they've* seen. . . ." But the good lady lost the luxury of her climax this time, because Challis interrupted.

"Could you mention any responsible householder who would tell me what I am accused of? I could call on my way back." Being thoroughly angry himself, he naturally spoke in a way that he knew would exasperate. This dry kind of speech was like a red rag to a bull in this old lady's case. Nothing is more infuriating than one's adversary's apparent contentment with mere words, left alone with their syntax, to shift for themselves. It makes one so conscious of one's own war-whoops, and one's occasional faulty expression of meaning, during attacks of uncontrolled anger.

"I am prepared for any evasion and prevarication from you, Alfred Challis. But I was not prepared—no, I was *not* prepared—for such an unblushing statement that you are kept in ignorance. Have I not told you plainly—have I not told you repeatedly—that this Miss Judith Arkroyd

is what is complained of? Have I disguised anything? What I have said is the shameful, disgraceful *truth*. The TRUTH, Alfred Challis! Down on your knees and acknowledge it!" A bouquet of vital doctrines essential to salvation hung about this; the attitude of kneeling was especially telling. More of the same sort followed.

When a lull came, Challis spoke. "Am I to see Marianne, or am I not?" said he. "I am convinced she is here, and I have a right to see her." The old woman kept glum silence, and he repeated his words. Then she said: "You shall not see her. It is no use. You had better go." He then said, "I know she is here, because I saw her blue silk sunshade in the entry," and left the room, as though to verify his observation. At the stair-foot he paused, and called aloud to his wife: "Polly Anne, Polly Anne! Are you there?" No answer came, and then the old woman came running out, quite inarticulate with rage and coughing.

"Listen to me," said he, and his manner stopped her. "I am going. But you will do well to pay attention to what I am going to say to you. If you repeat any impudent falsehoods about Miss Arkroyd or any other lady—yes!—whether you make them yourself or get them from any other pigsty or gutter, you will place yourself within reach of the law. You had better talk to Tillingfleet about it. He seems a sensible chap. At any rate, he will be able to tell you that people have been ruined before now by the damages they have had to pay for circulating filthy slanders without foundation. So be careful, grand-mamma! Good-night!"

He had been so self-restrained up to the moment when his anger broke out in speech that his worthy mother-in-law was taken completely aback by it. She remained so until the door closed behind him. It was then too late for any demonstration, and the disappointed guardian of family morals fell back into the house gobbling like a turkey-cock. Challis found Emma at the garden-gate, and gave her her half-crown of consolation. He received the impression that she had been sent out with orders to warn Martha and the children should they return, and head them off in time to prevent a meeting. He was

afterwards sorry he had not entered into conversation with this girl, and made a friend of her. But the truth is it was impossible for his mind to receive the idea that his wife's resolution would be a lasting one; and he felt confident of a penitent letter in a day or two, and an *amende honorable* to himself, whether he deserved one or not, for suspicions which he persisted in looking at as false *per se*, although one or two circumstances, quite outside their radius, might be coaxed into court by a malicious prosecution to testify against him. Any other anticipation was mere nightmare.

But a day passed, and another, and many postmen's knocks, each with its exasperation of hope frustrated; and many cabs, that might have ended in the voices of the children shouting to the cabman, by permission, which gate to stop at. And a loneliness indescribable, so unlike the happy empty days one gets for work now and again when one's housemates troop away to some assured haven elsewhere, and write every day, if it's only a postcard. How Challis envied the splendid self-absorption of our old friend the cat! How he envied the sound of a happy freedom in the chronic controversy of the kitchen; always the same controversy, but possibly on various subjects! How happy the tradesmen's boys seemed!—how callous to the smallness of the orders!

Every day he wrote a line to Marianne, ignoring all that had passed. She would give way in time. If he persevered, one day she would be unable to resist the temptation to reply; it would be a sort of hypnotic suggestion, mechanically brought about. It was on the day after his last visit to Tulse Hill that he made up his mind to try whether a letter to Judith would not procure one from her that would do some good. It could not make matters worse.

Oh, this strangely compounded clay, Man!—that any story should have to tell it! But it is true, too. This Alfred Challis, who, face to face with such grim reality of wreck at home, had as good as escaped from subjection to the witchcraft that had brought it about, had no sooner taken up his pen to write to its author, than he was again subject to the experience that has been spoken of as the

soul-brush. All his consciousness—which was intense—of his own folly could not prevent him attaching a special force to the first words of his letter. Surely "Dear Miss Arkroyd" might have been a pure formality, just as much as "Dear Grandmamma" would have been if he had brought himself to write to that veteran practitioner in discord-brewing. It was no such thing. A magic hung about the three words, with a suggestion in it of a phrase of music or a whiff of burnt incense. The image of Judith crept back promptly into his mind at permission given, suggesting disloyalties to his hope that Marianne would quarrel with her mamma, and take a reasonable view of the position—come back and reinstate life.

Why, in Heaven's name—he half asked himself—if it was to be like this, if Marianne was going to persist in her unreasonable jealousy, should not he take advantage of the freedom she forced upon him, of the legal pretext of an irregular marriage that assumed the right of Law and Usage to cancel a promise given and taken mutually, believed by each giver to come from the heart of the other? He would have flung from him angrily any suggestion of an advantage to come to himself from capping to a dirty Orthodoxy—the words are his, not the story's—from any joining in the World's dance; any acquiescence in the mops and mows of the Performing Classes; any obeisance to a great organization which—when it suited him—he chose to consider a mere mechanism for keeping the funds up and the fun going, and the distribution among the sanctioned of unlimited stars and garters and loaves and fishes. But if it were forced upon him in the face of his persistent repudiation of it, if the other contracting party flaunted it in his face, might not he avail himself of this pretext?—use a disgraceful shuffle in the service of truth? Was he not almost in honour bound to do so, to that lady in whom his evasive declaration of passion had elicited what was at least a strong disclaimer of indifference to himself?

But Challis only half asked himself these questions, because he knew the answer. He knew that he knew the difference between Right and Wrong, and he knew that his wife had Right on her side—not much, but some—and he



suspected that he had Wrong on his—not some, but much. So he finished his letter to Judith and posted it.

Judith wrote in answer to Challis's letter, and he forwarded an enclosure it contained, addressed to his wife. It was returned to him, torn in three or four pieces, by the next post. He joined it up and read it, and thought it the most sweet, conciliatory, angelic human document he had ever read. But, then, he was a man!

He went more than once to Tulse Hill after this, without succeeding in seeing Marianne. The third time he found the house empty, placed in the hands of an agent, who said in reply to all inquiries that his instructions were limited to dealing with the house. He was, he said, a House-Agent. But he would undertake that letters should be forwarded. He evidently enjoyed being civil, so satiated was he with the offensiveness of his position.

Mrs. Eldridge called on him as a peacemaker, having in tow her husband, who winked at him over her shoulder, uninterpretably. He said to her, subduing his anger well: "I would not have seen you, Charlotte Eldridge, if there had not been something I have been wishing to say to you. I cannot prove it, but I am as certain of it as that I stand here that it is you that have poisoned my wife's mind against me, and have filled it with every sort of nasty misinterpretation of a perfectly innocent friendship. You have known absolutely nothing of the lady whom you have thought fit to malign as a means of maligning me. . . . No, I know I have no means of knowing that you have ever said a single word against her. But my object in seeing you is to tell you that I am convinced that you have. I am convinced that Marianne has shown you my correspondence without any warranty—and for that she may be to blame—and that you have read into it meanings she never would have dreamed of ascribing to it, left to herself. I am, in short, sure that it is you—you—you at the bottom of all this mischief, and I tell you honestly that after you have left this door I shall not be sorry if I never see you or hear of you again. Good-bye!"

Mrs. Eldridge had thrown in denials; and when her husband, moved to eloquence, had interposed with "Come, I say now, Master Titus, ain't 'nasty misinterpretation' "

coming it rather strong!" had briefly directed him to be quiet till he was spoken to. She had then placed herself on oath, offering an extemporised solemnity if called on. "I am ready to go down on my knees here and now, Alfred Challis, and to call on God, who will one day be your judge and mine, to bear witness that this is a *cruel falsehood*! He knows"—here she threw in upper-case type freely—"that all my wish, all my effort, has been towards conciliation and peace. . . ."

At this point Challis interrupted her, saying curtly: "Then your efforts have not been very successful. I do not see that we shall gain anything by talking any more about it. Good-bye again!" This occurred before the exodus from Glenlairloch, or Challis might have been less unconciliatory, with an eye to keeping open a possible channel of communication with his wife, even though it would involve communication with a woman whom he now thoroughly detested.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE unhappy author hung on persistently at The Hermitage, in the face of the candid neglect of every duty by the servant who had given warning, and the uncandid pretences of Mrs. Steptoe that, in the absence of her mistress, which she treated as a thing *de die in diem*, the one object of her life, deep-rooted in her heart of hearts, was the comfort and well-being of her master. Her catering took the form so common in the British household, of a joint twice a week, twice re-incarnate as hash and mince, and a nice little bit of rump-steak on the odd day out. Her potatoes were hygrometric, owing to their being the wrong sort—there was great latitude for physical defect in that! Her other vegetables—lettuce, cabbage, what not!—had all lost their hearts, whatever was not stalk being flamboyant exfoliation. Even her brockilo sprouts were diffuse, and her cauliflowers wept. The bread was always second-hand—owing to the price of flour, said the baker's man, and he knew—and The Cheese was an affliction, a nightmare, which was supposed to be American or Cheddar, but whose days in the States or in Somersetshire were long, long ago.

Why did Challis endure it, when he might have thrown off all disguise and lived at his Club, where there is a capital library to write in, which nobody ever uses? Simply because of a pleasant dream he flattered his mind with, of a cab with luggage atop, and a sort of revised Marianne alighting, and the voices of his children. He was lying low for the fulfilment of this dream, without ever saying aloud to his heart that it was a possibility. Or, rather, he was fending against her return to the damper of an empty house. That would be altogether too sickening.

It was horribly dreary in the empty house. How he

would have rejoiced to hear but one short torrent of unruly fury, but one complaining whimper, from the unrevised Marianne of the past! But he was given over to the Silences and the intermittent sounds that drive them home—the tradesmen's boys—the postmen's knocks. This could not last for ever, though! Bob would be back from school—was overdue, in fact—and then he would keep watch and ward in his father's absence. Challis favoured an image in his mind of a hospitable Bob, welcoming his revised stepmother, and risking statements about his father's return in fabulously short periods. He devised a plan for Bob to ring him up at the Club from the call-station at East Putney.

He had a bad half-hour when Bob did return, knowing nothing, and found him the sole tenant of The Hermitage. He thought it best to take his stand on Mrs. Steptoe's security of indefinite to-morrows, treat the matter lightly, and assure Bob that his mater and sisters would come back in the course of a few days. Bob accepted the statement in view of the fact that he didn't know yet that his phonograph, reluctantly forsaken when he returned to school, had not suffered from neglect. Presently Challis heard the diseased voice of the hideous instrument, dwelling on the fascinations of a yellow girl; and, for once, felt grateful to its inventor. But it was only a short respite. Bob soon suspected something seriously wrong, and had to be told. Not the whole!—that was impossible; what could his father have told him? But he had to have his painful experience of a first family disruption, and to understand that the sort of thing that might happen in other chaps' homes was also possible in his own.

Challis, who was still writing disheartened letters to his wife, addressing them through the Tulse Hill house-agency, told of Bob's return, and earnestly begged her to make it possible for the boy to see his little sisters again. He received an answer, reposted by the agent, with only the Tulse Hill postmark. It was written by her mother, and contained a proposal for a sort of truce as far as Bob was concerned. Subject to a written guarantee that he himself would keep his distance, Bob might come. Then he

wrote earnestly and at length, dwelling on the cruelty of his wife's misjudgment of his actions, reproaching her with meanly taking advantage of a legal pretext to deprive him of his children, and imploring her, for their sake and his, only to consent to one interview. He was horribly embarrassed in writing this letter by the unwritten law—so his mind named it as he wrote—which dictates that every word that is written or spoken on this odious subject of men and women must be an equivocation or a shuffle. How could he formulate a phrase that would convey the truth to Marianne; acknowledge his aberration, and define its extent, without letting loose the whole gutter-brood of Charlotte Eldridge's to point the finger of denunciation at him; and, worst of all, to squirt at Judith, skunk-wise, and run away? And if he assumed what so many would be ready to accept as a sound view, that an attack of amorous intoxication didn't count, and denied fully and roundly that he had ever been guilty of any transgression at all—why, then, in the first place it would be a lie, in the second, the troop of skunks would only resort to another secretion. "You know, dear, a man always holds himself bound to deny, for the woman's sake." It was characteristic of Challis that he all but heard these words from the image his mind made of Charlotte Eldridge on a sofa, shading its eyes from the light with that confounded pretty hand of hers. "I see no way out of Charlotte Eldridge," said he in despair. He ended his letter by an ill-chosen phrase, which put his head in the lion's mouth. "Is a man never to be forgiven," it said, "because he is momentarily overtaken by passion for a lady under exceptional circumstances?" Mrs. Eldridge made her teeth meet over that expression, be sure of that!

The outcome of the negotiations that followed was that Bob spent the last half of his long vacation with his mother and sisters and grandmamma at Broadstairs, which was the place of retirement chosen by the last-named lady, to be out of her son-in-law's way. It was recognised by Mrs. Steptoe when Master Bob said where he was a-going.

"Well, now, Master Robert, to think you should go to Broadstairs of all places in the world! That near Ramsgate it is!"

"No, it isn't!" said Bob. "It's near Margate. I'm right, and you're wrong." But a compromise was effected over a railway-map in Bradshaw, very much tore across.

"That is where I saw your dear mamma, Master Robert, afore ever you was born or thought of. Ramsgate!"

The amenities of controversy were not Bob's strong point. He gave a prolonged shout of derision. "You never saw *my* dear mamma! Why, she died before I was born!" It was a hastily constructed sentence, and reflected very little credit on Rugby. You may recall Stony Stratford, and the way some person suffered from insect-bites there?

But Mrs. Steptoe repeated her statement, firmly but respectfully. Not only had she seen Bob's mamma, but his papa. "Very well, then, I'll tell the Governor," said Bob, and kept his word before he took his departure, two days later.

"What's this story my boy has, Mrs. Steptoe, about your seeing his mother and me at Ramsgate?" It was Sunday morning, and Challis was pretending to look at a series of volumes known as "The Books," in each of which a string of misstatements appeared, sanctioned at intervals by a rubber stamp. Challis made some pretence of adding up a total, to give Mrs. Steptoe time, and then repeated his question. "Yes—Master Bob. About Ramsgate. Where were you? I can't recollect you." His mind was seeking some younger Mrs. Steptoe among the children on the sands, far away from her lodging-house.

"You hardly would, sir!" said she. "I was attending to the house where you was visiting. I had undertook the cooking at my aunt's sister's—name of Cantrip. . . ."

"Can't recollect Cantrip."

"No, sir, not likely! But perhaps Hallock? . . . name of lady and gentleman stoppin' the season. . . . Coal-merchant, I believe, in a considerable way of business." This to keep the whole transaction on its proper level in Society.

"I remember Hallock," says Challis, reminiscent. "Man lost his hat over the cliff! . . . Oh yes—but I remember!—it was his house we dined at. . . ."

"That was the occasion, sir. . . . The Baker desired me to say, sir, that he was sorry, but it should not occur again. . . ."

"Never mind the Baker now, Mrs. Steptoe. Tell me about Mr. Hallock. I can't remember you, but I suppose you were there?"

"Not all along, but in and out of the room. I was divided with the kitchen. I remember the young lady very well." Mrs. Steptoe felt it would be safer to leave the young lady's name alone. The ground was shaky under her feet. In fact, she would rather the matter should never have come to Challis's knowledge.

His perception was growing of the oddity of Mrs. Steptoe knowing anything about it. "I can't understand," he said. "That youngster said you saw *his mother*. How came you to know the young lady was . . . how came you to connect . . . ?" He hesitated over the description of Kate. To say "the lady whom I subsequently married" would have been making Mrs. Steptoe too much of a family *confidante*.

Now, that good woman had no objection to being of importance, but she wanted to keep safe, first and foremost. She had nothing to confess to personally; was, in fact, blameless. Why not simply tell all she knew? She took that course, telling all that happened about the photograph; but suggesting that the whole occurrence had been slight, trivial, colloquial—rather than otherwise hinting at surprise that Mr. Challis had known nothing about it. Why had she not told him? He made the inquiry, but interrupted her disclaimer of any *locus standi* in the matter, with an admission that he had asked a nonsensical question. Why *should* she have done anything but hold her tongue? She was quite an outsider. Well!—leave her outside. That was the obvious course.

"Thank you, Mrs. Steptoe," said Challis. "I fancy I remember that photograph. . . . Oh, the Baker!—yes! Tell him to be very careful that it doesn't occur again. . . . No, nothing else. That's all; good-morning!"

But his face, always grave now, was graver than ever as he hunted through the photograph albums he disinterred from the chiffonier Charlotte Eldridge had exploited so successfully, and got no success for himself. He found what he supposed to be the spaces these Ramsgate portraits had occupied, but nothing in them. They were two

or three sudden blanks in a well-packed book. Marianne had taken them away.

For the first time since the rupture he felt undisguisedly angry with his wife. It was too bad!—what had he done that she should be so secretive and mistrustful? Why could she not frankly ask him for an explanation? After all, it was a subject he would have been so glad she should be in his confidence about, and one he had only kept back from her to spare her a needless disquiet. To get absolution for himself he resumed the whole story of his silence and its reasons. He failed to see how differently the thing had presented itself to her.

What would Kate have said to him—thought of him—if, when he first came to her mother's house, he had made a clean breast of the whole story to any of the family? As long as she kept silence, surely he was bound to do so? And then, when Kate was in her grave, or in Heaven, according to the immediate exigency of speech-without-thought among believers in God-knows-what—all this is Challis's language—when, anyhow, her demise had qualified her to be spoken of in a hushed voice, was he to intrude a revelation of a transaction that would have been at least out of keeping with the ideal Marianne's memory had made of a beloved and lamented elder sister? Then, as time went on, and no one seemed a penny the worse that the whole thing should be forgotten, the lock that shut the secret in got rusty, as such locks do, and Challis felt far from certain that he could turn the key at all, if he tried.

Besides, for this last five years there had been another cause for silence. Challis had not been entirely without tidings of the man Keith Horne in his subsequent career. He had identified him—to his own satisfaction, at least—with the central figure of a hideous story told to him by a gaol-chaplain, an observer to whom he was indebted for much material for copy of a most popular sort. This particular atrocity was unfit for publication, even in a modern novel, and made Challis feel grateful to its miserable perpetrator for what would otherwise have been the crowning act in a series of betrayals. He sometimes even felt uncertain whether he ought not to feel unreserved



thankfulness, and ascribe credit to him for what may have been the only noble motive of his life. He had endeavoured to trace the ex-convict, but without success.

Perhaps the way in which Challis regarded this man's relation with his first wife and himself may suggest itself from the gaol-chaplain's having laid great stress on the interest this man excited in his colleague, the surgeon of the gaol. If the patching up of an absolutely rotten profligate, that he might complete a term of penal servitude and return to his sins, was a thing to be desired, then that surgeon had a right to his triumph. That does not come into the story. But those who have given any attention to the pathology of disorders incidental to the ways of destroying body and soul adopted by this wretched creature will be able to understand why every year that added to Master Bob's stature, and increased his impudence, without a trace of any visible taint of constitution, was one more nail in the coffin of a painful misgiving, which Challis was only too glad should never have been shared by the mother of Bob's sisters. As Marianne never came to a knowledge of the ugly story, we may dismiss it finally, having only cited it because it appears to supply a justification of Challis's persistent concealment from her of her sister's former marriage.

The story draws a long breath of relief as it returns to Bob, who had come back from school fuming with an uncharitable jealousy against a boy named Tillotson, who had two Camberwell Beauties, while Bob had only one. So the few days he spent at home were chiefly employed tearing over Wimbledon Common and Richmond Park with a butterfly-net in a tropical heat. Then he ate his dinner too fast, and rushed away to his phonograph, at whose maw he gloated over incidents of Love and Jealousy in the plantations of Louisiana. As his father allowed him to do exactly what he liked, he was able to give full vent to his devotion to this pestilent abomination. He even wound it up to stand at his bed's head and soothe his first sleep with "Bill Bailey."

But when Bob departed for Broadstairs, the desolation was worse than ever. Challis met it boldly, writing per-

sistently all day, and spending the evening at his Club. He was rather glad town was so empty; for, indeed, a week or so after the boy said good-bye to his governor, hugging him as a French or Italian boy would have done, no two folk who met seemed ready to accept each other as actual. "You don't mean to say *you're* here!" was the commonest greeting. But the incredulity of each gave way before the other's attestation of his existence.

Challis's disbelief in the presence in Grosvenor Square of any of The Family was so strong that he had no misgivings whatever on the point when he knocked at the door with drawn cards in his hand, and set phrases of inquiry on his tongue. He felt so reassured by the opacity of the closed windows, parading the emptiness of the mansion, and the *insouciance* of the nondescript who looked up from the area at him before coming to the door, that he never doubted that his visit would end as he himself at any rate believed he intended it to do. Was he glad or sorry—did he know himself?—when a light step caught him up at the street-corner, and a musical voice said, "Oh, please, Mr. Challis!" It was Cintilla.

Cintilla and Challis had always been on the most familiar terms, so if he did take her dimpled chin between his thumb and forefinger before saying, "Oh, please what, Miss Tenterden?" the butcher's boy need not have pretended to look the other way ostentatiously. Tenterden, by-the-bye, was the little maid's real name—Clemency Tenterden.

"Please I was to catch you and bring you back for Miss Judith."

"You don't mean that Miss Judith is in town?"

"Oh no!—not *really* in town. Why, you should see the state the house is in! And Mrs. Protheroe has gone to her brother James's widow at Bridport." Mrs. Protheroe was the housekeeper.

"We won't dispute about terms, Miss Tenterden. I gather that Miss Judith is not technically in town. I suppose she's going on somewhere—that's it, isn't it?"

"Oh yes—and, please, it's such fun, Mr. Challis. She's going to Biarritz to stay, and take me, and I'm to learn to speak French." Evidently there was one little maid in

this world having a high old time, and determined to make the most of it.

There was an island on a rug in the back-parlour—the sole outbreak of visible furniture in a wilderness of brown holland, and rolled-up carpets, and chandeliers in bags, and pictures whose backs provoked an interest none had ever felt in their faces. “Like some females,” thought Challis, as he picked his way to the island through the *débris*. On the island was its Calypso, the only member of The Family in town.

Judith was as beautiful as ever, as she extended both hands to him. “I’m so glad the child caught you, Scroop,” said she. Absolute self-possession!—Estrildis herself could not have been more collected. “But I’m sorry for things. Now sit down and let us talk reasonably.... Yes—there!” This was to Cintilla, fixing a nicely chosen distance for Challis, neither too far nor too near. Cintilla would have liked to supply a chair a little nearer; she had no idea of people being so artificial.

Challis’s self-possession was far from absolute. In fact, he was tremulous. “You were good to send that letter,” he said. But the last word sounded like “letterm,” as he checked his speech short.

“You were going to say ‘Miss Arkroyd,’” said she. “At least, do not let us be prigs. Call me Judith—at least, for now.”

Could it matter, either way? “You were good to send that letter, Judith,” he repeated. “But, as I told you, it did no good—has done no good.” For he had written as much, and some more, to Royd. But his pen had always stopped short of a full account of his desolation.

“I suppose we’re all human,” said she absently; and the remark seemed to want application. “What leads you to suppose she will never forgive you? What she says?” Challis shook his head. “Her manner?... No?—then what?”

“You don’t understand.... Well!—I have never told you, certainly. Marianne... I have never succeeded in seeing her. She and her mother have gone away from London, and in order that my boy may not be separated from his sisters, I have been obliged to promise not to follow them.” He explained the position more fully.

Judith laughed, and Challis heard nothing sinister in her laugh. But, then, he was on Calypso's island.

"You are too soft-hearted, Scroop. Really, you must forgive my laughing! But you are so very—Arcadian!" Challis waited visibly for an explanation. "Couldn't you see that what this dear good woman will want, when she gets tired, will be a golden bridge to come back across? Something to save her face! *She'll* never admit she was wrong. But for the sake of the children, don't you see? We are in the region of high unselfish motive at once."

Marianne would never admit she was wrong! Very likely; but the point was, was she wrong? Challis caught himself almost taking sides with Penelope against Calypso. The point was danger-point in these seas. Never was a stranger clash in a human soul than the one Challis was conscious of when he half-resented the tone in which the woman he had a passion for spoke of the one for whom he had an affection. We had nearly written "the one whom he loved." But surely he loved Judith?—or what is the vocabulary of the Poets worth? The ambiguities of language have been beforehand with the story, and it cannot stop to *préciser* them.

"Marianne will not persist a moment after she is convinced she is wrong." He spoke a little stiffly—almost a mild censure of Calypso. But as a set-off he took for granted that Penelope *was* wrong, past contention.

"Perhaps I should have said she will never *believe* she was wrong. Better than 'admit.'" This was spoken with placid indifference. One might have thought the speaker absorbed in the flashing of brilliants on the beautiful hand she was holding to catch a sunset-ray from the back-window; the palm, as she shifted it about, showing each finger outlined with transmitted rosy light. Challis tried to reason away its witchery—to quash its jurisdiction. But it was a fatal hand. "Go on telling me," said its owner. "Tell me more about Marianne. What do you suppose she thinks?"

"I have no right to suppose she thinks any more than she said in her letter. I told you in my letter all I think I had any right to repeat."

"And I have no right to be inquisitive. But the letter spoke plainly. I am convinced of it."

"The letter was indignant with me for showing *her* letter to you before, as she supposed, I had read it myself."

"Before, as she supposed." This was mere repetition of the phrase, as a writer from dictation might have spoken. She turned her eyes full on him. "You *hadn't* read it, Scroop," she said.

"I had to the best of my belief, at the time I showed it to you." He is a little nettled, and she sees it. He embarks on self-justification—a thing one should never do. "There was not a single word in what I supposed the letter contained that you might not have read. My statement that I had not read the words on the back was entitled to some consideration. I never put anything of importance away in a postscript, where it may be overlooked." He stopped abruptly, feeling irrelevant.

"Because you are an eminent author! We mustn't forget that." Judith's laugh lightened the conversation.

"No, no, Scroop! you haven't got a leg to stand on, and you had better admit it. You oughtn't to have shown me the letter."

"Very well—admitted! But admit, too, that I have made amends as far as I could. It seems to me that a mountain has been made out of a molehill . . ."

Challis stopped suddenly, very ill at his ease. Judith, with a look half amused, half expectant, waited. She evidently was not going to help. Indeed, she would not have found it easy. Each knew that the conversation was being sustained artificially by attaching undue weight to the fact that Marianne's sole ground of complaint was this showing of her letter. Each knew how much more there was behind; how strong Marianne's indictment might have been with a full knowledge of the facts. After all, this blaming her for unjust action, on imperfect data, which would have been just had the whole come to light, was the merest quibble, and both knew it.

Judith broke the silence first, but only with what amounted to a declaration that she would not help. "There must be a beautiful sunset somewhere," was all it came to. And then matters were relieved by the

silvery voice of Cintilla. Might she take away the tea-things? Yes—she might. While she did so, the talk turned on the legal question of Marianne's right to capture the children. Challis had, he said, consulted more than one legal friend on the subject, and they were all in a tale. The children were illegitimate, and *therefore* belonged to their mother. He got some satisfaction, evidently, from shredding a conspicuous absurdity of human law—why should children be claimable at all by a father who was a mere predecessor *et præterea nihil*—just a parent? He himself had made his title good to these two kids by his share in fostering them. Had his claim been a legal one only, he would have foregone it to make way for that of their natural owner. But he touched the matter very lightly. It did not outlast the removal of the tea-things.

Then Judith, going to the window, stood looking out, watching the light die from a cloud whose underside had broken into ridges of rosy flame. Its last ridge no longer saw the sun, when she turned slowly, coming back to a seat nearer Challis than the one she had occupied.

"This will be good-bye," she said. "I am going to Biarritz, and shall be away till January certainly. I did not want to go without seeing you again. So I was glad when the child came running up to say it was you, and shouldn't she catch you?" Her speech was redolent of self-command; no concessions to the pathos of parting.

"May I write to you?"

"I was going to ask you to do so. I shall hope to hear that your home is happy again, and that all goes well. This sort of thing has happened before—oh dear, how often!"

As Challis sat during the short silence that followed, not looking at all at his companion, one might almost have fancied that he shrank away from her, as one afraid. He found a voice to answer her, but not easily.

"I will write," he said. "And, believe me, Judith, in what I am going to say now I am speaking truth. I look with hope to the softening of my poor wife's heart, to the sound of her return to my empty home, and the voices of my babies...."

"Why should you suppose I doubt you? Of course you do!"

"Yes, but, dearest!—I must call you so, or call you something with some heart in it; pardon me!—can I tell the reason? Can the reason be told?... Oh yes, of course, I know what you are going to say—it is reason enough that she is my wife, that the kids are my kids, that the home is my home. So it is; but there is more reason than that, and I am at a loss to tell it.... What?"

But Judith left whatever it was unsaid, and exchanged it for "No—go on!"

"Perhaps I do wrong when I use the only words I can find when I say that I long for Marianne back again to help me against you? Ought I not to say to help me against myself? Where is the fault in you that you are what you are? You are blameless, at least. It is I that must needs love you!"

And perhaps the story does wrong to allow a suspicion that, in the heart that beautiful face belonged to, was a half-formed thought that the speaker was even more Arcadian than the owner of both had suspected. But it creeps in—this suspicion—with the telling of a smile kept under by lips on the watch to check it. One thing may be relied on: Miss Arkroyd was not the least agitated.

Challis saw nothing of her face, as he never raised his eyes, and his face was half averted. He continued: "I cannot help an experience that no one will believe. I have no appeal against it. But I tell you this—that when I came home after... after that evening at Royd, when I forgot myself and told the truth, for a few hours I forgot you too. As I sit here now, it seems to me a thing absolutely incredible. Even when Marianne turned against me on grounds that seemed to me almost a pretext, no memory of you or my folly—call it so if you will—anything you like!—no memory came back to me. Indeed, it is almost as though I had been two men by turns." He raised his eyes to hers, with a slowly-drawn breath, as of fatigue, from the turmoil of his own feelings. If there was any of the smile left then, she was in time to cancel it.

But she hardly said anything. A mere run of the vowels of a sentence, as one speaks through a yawn, is not speech. It just made him say "What?" but evidently had no share in the question she replied to him with, and

stopped in the middle of, "And what was it then made you ? . . ." But the words she had decided on ignoring were "How funny men are !" Let us hope there was some affectation of indifference in this.

Challis understood her question. "What made my disorder break out again ?" he repeated. "I can't fix the time. But now that I have been forced to discard one of my selves—the one that hoped for the calm of his old home life again . . . no, Judith, indeed there have been many happy times . . ."

"Why ? Did you think I doubted it ?"

"I wasn't sure . . . But I had not finished. Now that my hope has been simply strangled, I have to be my other self, in self-defence. I tell you—I must tell you—that the thought of you is with me every hour of the day, and what have I to help me to fight against it ? Even my boy is away, and what adds to the cruelty of the position is that, will I nill I, I have to feel glad of his absence. Because when he was with me I was in constant terror of being asked for explanations which I could not give. A girl of his age would have been far easier to tell it to."

"Do you think so ? I feel as if I could tell him about it all—much, much easier !" During some chat over the fact, and its strangeness, that the tongue of either sex is freest in speech with its opposite, on this one particular subject of Love, Challis felt, as they sat on in the growing twilight, that the soul-brush was at work again with a vengeance. The utter satisfaction of his thirst for speech about himself and his plight was so much sheer nectar to him while it lasted. If he paid for it after, at least his draught should be a deep one now. He confessed to the extent to which his constant home-life in the past had stood in the way of the formation of intimate friendships, and that he really had no one he could confide in. "I have a second cousin," said he—he was always absurd, sooner or later—"who has an impediment and a wig, and is slightly deaf. No, I really could *not* take him into my confidence." Judith said : "Of course you couldn't ; I see that." "Besides," he continued, "he wears spats, and goes through courses of treatment for dyspepsia at Cheltenham." And Judith said again : "I see."



"The only man I have spoken to about it," continued Challis, "is Athelstan Taylor. Well, I suppose he's about the only man I know that I could speak to. You know he came to see me straight away. You told him!"

"Yes, I told him. I showed him my letter—the one I wrote to your wife. He said I could not possibly write a better one. And she tore it up and sent it back!"

"She did. You know he went to try and see her, and only succeeded in getting at the door, but he never got in. I had built on his being a parson—I thought it might be some use for once. But I suppose he was the wrong sort somehow—out of the wrong cove."

"Did he give offence over the Deceased Wife's Sister question?"

"Why, yes! The hag said he ought to be hanged for saying he didn't care a straw about the legal question, and only wanted to clear up what seemed a painful misunderstanding. The cloth fell through, and the old body drove him out with religious hoots."

"There's a thing you won't mind my asking?..."

"Go on!"

"People are saying—political people—that the Bill will pass the Lords next summer, and that then all past marriages of the sort will be legalised, because it will be *retrospective*—I believe that's the proper word. Suppose it passes, what shall you do then?"

"Get the kids back, of course! And then Polly Anne will come to her senses. But she will—she will, you know—before that."

"Suppose she laid claim to having annulled her marriage, while she still had a legal right to do so?"

"It wouldn't be allowed. She's a woman. Women's claims are not allowed in law-courts. It's heads Law wins, tails they lose... Yes!—I should stoop to take advantage of it in this case."

"Perhaps you would be right, this once. We must hope it will pass."

"I do hope it—with most of my heart. Do you believe me? Can you believe me, in the face of what I have said to you?" For Challis knew quite well that this profession of a hope was only what he knew he would be

able to say when the soul-brush stopped, and that he said it now mechanically. Wait till he was off Calypso's island!

Judith left his question unanswered; put it aside, rather. "I suppose you know it's all settled about Frank and Sibyl?" she said. Oh yes—Challis knew. When would it be? As soon after Christmas as possible, Judith supposed. An interruption—Cintilla with a letter—was not unwelcome. But she needn't light up; when Mr. Challis was gone would do. "That was a broad hint, Scroop," said Calypso, lying back in her chair with the unopened letter in that destructive hand fallen idly on her lap.

But in a few moments, when he took the hint and made a move towards departure, she rose. And if the truth must be told, she went quite as near a good stretch and a shake as such high breeding as hers could allow itself. It did not matter; her grace and beauty, perhaps her dress-maker, negatived the action. That bodice was perfect in cut. "You know, Scroop, that this is good-bye?" she said. And then in reply to his assent: "We won't be mawkish over it, please! I want you to make me a promise, and keep it. . . . Well, yes!—I'll tell you what it is. It would hardly be fair to make you promise in the dark. Promise not to come to Biarritz!" Challis hesitated, but promised. Judith laughed. "I was right, you see," she said. "You would have asked about trains at Cook's to-morrow."

There they stood, in the half-dark! Was Calypso saying to herself: "Now, can I trust this man to break his promise?" Was Challis asking himself, did she mean him to keep it?

In the end she spoke first, with a sudden movement that implied an end to disguise. "Oh dear, how silly one is! Why should we not speak plain? After all, we are alive, and grown up." Yet it seemed difficult, too, and came with an effort. "Listen to me, Scroop, and don't try to say things—because it does no good. You and I have to say good-bye, and mean it. We are best apart, for both our sakes. You as good as said but now that you would forget me if Marianne would help. That is what it came

to ; don't deny it !" Challis felt that his attempt to lay his soul bare had failed ; that he was being misinterpreted. But he had a poor case ; silence was safest. She continued : " It is not as if I were prepared to quarrel with my family for your sake. I certainly would not for anyone else's, if that is any satisfaction to you. But suppose I were, have you asked yourself what course would be open to us ? . . . Oh yes !—I am talking like a lawyer ; but a woman has to be practical when her life is at stake. . . Well !—what could you do ? Ignore your marriage, under the false warranty of a law we both disallow, and make a sort of Gretna Green business of it next spring ? . . . "

" Why next spring ? I don't see how the time comes in. "

" Foolish man ! You haven't thought the matter out. Just think of it *now*. Suppose that Bill were to pass next session—or next whatever it is—while we are arranging this escapade ? . . . what would you do then, please ? "

" I can't look at it in that—concrete way. "

" Because it puts you in a fix. " She had a half-hearted laugh for man's superior wisdom, with his eyes closed to all practical issues. Then her voice got a sudden tone. " Come, we must part, you and I ! There is nothing else for it. It is all nonsense about your wife. She will come to her senses. She will have to, if the Bill passes. "

" I should not try to compel her against her will. "

" Are you sure ? Might it not be your duty to the children ? . . . Now, don't let's talk about it any more. It must come to good-bye in the end. . . . " Her words hung fire, but she kept her self-control admirably ; no one could have called her excited, much less hysterical. Then she said, in a quick, subdued voice : " I shall always think of our good time—before all this—as one of the happiest times of my life. Now good-bye ! "

Why could the man not shake hands and go, without more ado ? Of course, that would have been the correct form—left his cards—sent his compliments to The Family—*bon voyage* !—all that sort of thing ! Well !—perhaps the woman did not mean him to.

What happened was this—that is, this is all the story needs : that Judith repeated decisively, " Good-bye ! " and Challis said never a word. But he had her hands in

his, and it was some slight emphasis in his clasp, or some little turn a bystander would not have seen, from which she shrank back, saying: "No—or listen! Promise me again you will not come to Biarritz." To which he replied: "I promise." Then she said: "Very well, then—on those terms say good-bye how you like."

Then it was that Challis made matters ten times worse, ten times harder to deal with in that period of his life that followed. It is a curious thing that one good long kiss—a transaction that when in a frolic has absolutely no meaning whatever—should acquire from its concomitants a force to cling about the memory, and in a sense to warp the understanding, of its executant—the only word we can find at a short notice. It did, in this case, and possibly Calypso meant it should do so all along—administered her little dose of nectar with a full knowledge of its powers as an intoxicant. Indeed, if Miss Arkroyd had it in her heart through all this last interview to complete the winding of that skein she began a twelve-month back, she could scarcely have handled the thread more cleverly.

It is not for this story to decide what the young lady had in her heart. For all it knows, she may have felt either triumphant, disgusted, or indifferent, when she saw the name of Mr. Alfred Challis the author—"Titus Scroop" in a parenthesis—in the list of recent arrivals at Biarritz, and did not mention the fact to her hostess or any of her friends. But she met Mr. Challis on the esplanade next day, and introduced him to them equably as a friend of her father's. She must have forgiven him his broken promise, or ignored it.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

WHEN Miss Arkroyd came back to her sister's wedding in January it was not to Grosvenor Square, but Royd Hall. A wedding in London in midwinter would have been too awful. Fancy being married in a thick fog! Thus it happened that Grosvenor Square remained packed in brown holland and carpetless until the Family came back from abroad in April. The middle of that month saw the wrappers off the picture-frames and the carpets on the stairs. The windows were cleaned, and the beds were made, and the fires were lighted. These last in every room, for snow and sleet were whirling about in the Square; and the full horror of an average Spring was cutting Londoners to the quick, after hopes had been held out of an abnormal one.

The housekeeper's room in the basement had as good a fire in it as the best; and the butler, who had been abroad with the Family, and had come back in advance to prepare the way for it, was taking a cup of tea there, and chatting over the occurrences during his absence with the lady in possession, Mrs. Protheroe, the housekeeper—a responsible person, to whom it was safe to speak about things, under reserve. One of the things was a thing to the importance of which we couldn't shut our eyes, if true. It threw all other subjects into the shade.

"That's the gentleman, Mrs. Protheroe. You mark my words if it isn't!" And Mr. Elphinstone repeated his words, that they might be better marked, more than once, in the silence that followed.

"I shall be very greatly shocked, Mr. Elphinstone, if it turns out like you think. But we must hope and pray no such a disgrace could happen to the Family."

The old lady, a perfect example of her kind, who had

known the Family through two generations, was gravely disquieted provisionally. But such a thing was not to be accepted lightly, whatever it was. Dismiss it or condemn it, certainly! Entertain it, scarcely!

Mr. Elphinstone appeared to revolve something in his mind. It found expression in the words, "It was Michaelmas. Last Michaelmas twelve months. Just a year and a half."

"He and his wife dined once, and then he came down to Royd." In Mrs. Protheroe's speech all things relate to the Family, so there is no need to say whom Mr. and Mrs. Challis dined with.

"Too free and easy, to my thinking. Wife a stupid sort. Spoken of so afterwards in the Family freely. 'Armless, I should have put it at, myself.'"

"Received, certainly!" Mrs. Protheroe shows that she anticipates comment on the stupid lady's social drawbacks. But Mr. Elphinstone covers the ground fully.

"No questions were asked," he says. "Subsequently it was elicited Deceased Wife's Sister. Information from Bishop Barham's lady at the Castle."

"But her ladyship had called when in London." The implication was that the Family's *ægis*, once extended, was not a thing that could be withdrawn without loss of prestige. Mr. Elphinstone can recall, with reflection, incidents bearing on this point.

"In my hearing," he says, "no one but the Family being present, strong opinions tending to liberality received sanction. His lordship the Bishop's lady being referred to as bigoted, Sir Murgatroyd especially exculpating. Parties happening to be other parties' Deceased Wife's Sisters said to be victims of equivocal state of Law. I should say, too—but this, Mrs. Protheroe, is merely opinion—that the voice of her Grace the Duchess had weight, being thrown in the scale on the side of Toleration." Mr. Elphinstone felt pleased with his figure of speech, although he knew it was not original. He was indebted for it to Mr. Ramsay Tones, to whom he was an attentive listener.

"Her ladyship," said Mrs. Protheroe, "has been pre-disposed towards her Grace from a child. Addicted, you might almost say. Some do think her Grace's opinions too easy."

"In this case," said Mr. Elphinstone, who wished to pursue his sketch of the *status quo*, whatever it was, "nothin' applied. Owing, I should say, to the fundamental attitude of Mrs. Challis. Both young ladies, as well as her ladyship, having gone lengths—I assure you, Mrs. Protheroe, having gone great lengths."

The housekeeper was not inclined to admit that she knew less than the butler. "So I have understood," she said, and added nods about more things she knew, but held in reserve. But she would not entirely exclude Mr. Elphinstone. "Miss Sibyl behaved sweet, I must say. But it was just no use at all, any more than a lump of lead."

The butler looked introspective and analytical.

"You have to consider, ma'am," said he, unconsciously borrowing a phrase from Dr. Johnson, "that class-feeling may run high when least expected. Can we blame a lady of her style for refusing to mix? Especially when compliance leads to ructions."

Mrs. Protheroe looked thoughtful, too. "Once to dinner," she said. "Once to an evening. Afterwards excuses. No—Mr. Elphinstone. I'll tell you just how I see it. No lady would ever feel so to undervalue herself—not to the extent of denying herself. Their looks satisfy, personally, and give confidence. But, sought for in Society on behalf of their husbands—no!"

This way of putting the case would bear polishing, no doubt! But when we have said that no woman with any *amour propre* at all would keep out of brilliant Society on her merits, but might do so rather than be the mere satellite of a distinguished husband, have we improved so very much on Mrs. Protheroe's inexactitudes?

Mr. Elphinstone would take a second cup of tea, thank you! He was determined to sift to the dregs this matter he couldn't shut his eyes to. "I should like, ma'am," said he, "to pursue the sequel with you, having spoken so frank. Allow me! It is impossible for me, although no names are mentioned, to keep going a pretence of ignorance." He dropped his voice. "There is great warmth of feeling in the Family; it cannot be disguised. The Family sometimes forget the presence of the household, and raise their voices. The household may conscientiously

withdraw, but the principle continues to hold good that scraps leak out." Mr. Elphinstone seemed to feel a reluctance, creditable in so old a retainer, to confess to so much knowledge of the Family's private affairs, overheard against his will; and his apologies for this knowledge made him prolix. Abbreviated, his narrative told of fiery passages of arms between Judith and her mother and sister; more temperate, but still warm, discussion between the former and her father, and a certain amount of chance phrases from semi-confidential talk between her ladyship and the Duchess, and one or two others. But they all related manifestly to a determination of Judith to marry a gentleman the Family would have none of on any terms. And this not on the score of class-prejudice, nor of ways and means, nor of any personal aversion, but simply because the said gentleman was to all intents and purposes a married man. Having regard to some niceties of social intercourse, or their omission, as between Mr. Alfred Challis and Miss Arkroyd, their frequent correspondence and obvious *empressement* in each other's society, there could be no reasonable doubt who this gentleman was. Mr. Elphinstone's second cup must have been cold by the time he drank it, so absorbed was he in this narrative.

"I don't see all you do, Mr. Elphinstone, nor hear. Naturally, because of opportunities! But I *have* seen our Miss Judith and this Mr. Challis together. . . ."

The butler interrupted. "He's been honoured with knighthood, as I understand. Sir Alfred Challis. Doo to literary distinction!"

"Oh, indeed, I didn't know." Mrs. Protheroe was impressed. "Sir Alfred Challis. Well, I should have said, without ever being told, they was going on. And you said she called him Alfred, and said she would marry him?" This referred to the most striking passage of the butler's narrative. Repetition would reinforce it.

"It was exactly that," said he. "I was approachin' the door, and endeavoured to call attention. But Miss Judith, partly not noticing, partly in her 'igh mood, not caring, just went on: 'I should marry Titus if he were divorced,' she was just shouting it out in a tempest. 'I



*should,*' she says. 'Why should I not marry him, when this woman is not his wife?' And then, 'If she is his wife, how dares she refuse to live with him?' And then, 'If she is his wife, how dares she deprive him of his children? Answer that!' It all came very quick. Then Miss Judith, she sees me—just come in—and says to me, a bit quieter: 'No, Elphinstone, don't you go. I'm going.' And sweeps out, white. I asked pardon, but the bell had rung twice. Her ladyship says, 'Never mind, Elphinstone!' Then she sinks back like on the sofa, and says to Miss Sibyl . . ."

The housekeeper interrupted. "We mustn't call her ladyship out of her name," she said deprecatingly.

"Old 'abit!" says Mr. Elphinstone. "Where was I? . . . Oh, says to Lady Felixthorpe, 'The girl frightens me.' And then, 'Oh dear!—fancy her making a scene here in the Hotel!' Then Miss Sib . . . her ladyship, Lady Felixthorpe, she says to me: 'Can't the people in the next room hear every word through that door, Elphinstone?' As if I knew everything, Mrs. Protheroe!"

"You reassured her ladyship, Mr. Elphinstone?"

"I mentioned that the party in the next room was fouring, and not unlikely unfamiliar with English. Also, if anyone was there they would be audible—all being alike in that respect on the Continent—but in point of fact the suite was vacant." His cup was, too. When he had received another, and said "Thank you," he added: "But that was not the only occasion, by many, Miss Judith made use of the expression 'Titus.'"

From this it may be gathered that the Family, diminished by one of the daughters, had after her wedding fled to the Riviera, and remained until an enjoyable sunshine convinced them—they being English—that it was getting too hot, and also imposed on their credulity to the extent of making them believe Spring had begun in England. So, at this moment, they are *en route* for Grosvenor Square, somewhere, having sent Elphinstone on ahead, to get the house ready for their arrival. He and Mrs. Protheroe have, therefore, a splendid opportunity for comparing notes, and just before we found them doing so he had remarked that a gentleman whom Mrs. Protheroe would

remember two years ago—"play-acting gentleman—friend of Miss Judith's—slight, middle-aged—soft felt hat—talked to himself—smoker—got him?" had turned up at Mentone just before he left, and had renewed his intercourse with the Family.

Thereupon Mrs. Protheroe, who had "got" Challis after some effort of memory, had said uneasily: "I hope that would not be the same gentleman. . . ." And Mr. Elphinstone had asked, "What gentleman?" On which Mrs. Protheroe pleaded, apologetically, guilty to gossip. Perhaps she ought not to have said it. But there, it was only the club, after all. Little Tilley! All nonsense, most likely! Being pressed, she had produced a letter from Cintilla, saying boldly that "Miss Judith's lover had reappeared, and they'd made it up; only her ladyship and Sir Murgatroyd refused to see him." The pretty little ex-dairy maiden, whom a course of spoiling had not improved, had withheld the name of Miss Judith's admirer. Mrs. Protheroe might guess. It was then that Mr. Elphinstone noted his desire that his words should be marked. No doubt Mrs. Protheroe marked them as little as you and I have done in response to like appeals.

However, this April chat, more than ten months after Challis wrote his letter to Judith, to get her to try to whitewash him in Marianne's eyes, will serve to show how the pieces have shifted on the board. For an untold gap in a tale is like the hour of the game of chess you, the spectator, were called away from to speak to Mrs. Smith. When you left, not a piece was lost, and Black had taken the opportunity to castle. When you returned, White and Black had exchanged queens, and heaps of pawns and pieces were smiling sickly smiles upon the floor, and had lost interest in the proceedings, as you had done yourself. Still, you pretended that you could see exactly what had happened, which was fibs. But you recovered interest in the game then, and may do so in the story. However, the intervening *hiatus* cannot be left an absolute blank.

It was made up, for Challis, of more or less disguised dangling at the heels of Judith Arkroyd, broken by several short excursions, pleasant enough, abroad, and one short,

dreary sojourn at his own empty home. This was chosen at the period of Bob's holidays, which were divided by that young man impartially between Wimbledon and Broadstairs. He showed an accommodating, unenquiring spirit in his acceptance of the *status quo*, as somehow or other right; offering to fight any disputant of his own sex and weight who suggested that his domestic arrangements were exceptional. He silenced controversy by trenchant expressions, such as "You shut up, anyhow!" and went so far once as to tell Tillotson—who had two Camberwell Beauties, certainly, but was in all other human relations an Awful Little Humbug—that Dean Tillotson, his father, and Lady Augusta Tillotson, his mother, only resided together to produce a false impression of concord on the cathedral-town society they were a central pivot of. Once out of the public sight, according to Bob, this worthy prelate—of whom he knew absolutely nothing—and his aristocratic wife "went on" like a cat and dog. Morally, of course! Bob admitted, under catechism, that her ladyship was not driven up trees and afraid to come down because the Dean was barking at the bottom; but, metaphorically speaking, he held to his indictment—provisionally, at least, until it should be shown in a fair ordeal of battle that the owner of the Camberwell Beauties could lick its promulgator. Challis ventured to dwell on the unfairness of making the preservation of an unblemished family reputation turn on such an issue, but Bob was deaf to argument. Europe would see, next term, if he didn't give Tillotson an awful licking, and thereby prove his words true. He would have done so last term, only that old fool Spit had caught the combatants *in flagrante delicto*, and made them write alternate verses of the sixth book of the "Iliad" all through, off the same copy.

Bob's reports of the household at Broadstairs were Challis's only information about Mariann's and the little girls, and it appeared from these that his mother had been loyal to her husband in one respect; she had kept back the reasons of their separation from the children. Circumstances had been glossed over—veils drawn. Young folk can be easily duped by guardians and parents, who do not generally scruple—did yours?—to take advantage of

their simplicity. As long as his father and mother were satisfied, Bob was content. And as long as his sisters felt in some sort of touch with "at home," through his own holiday visits "at grandmamma's," their enquiries took no very active form. Challis could not ask his boy the questions he longed to ask. How was it possible, for instance, to say to him, "Do Chobbles and Mumps never ask after their Pappy?" He was constantly in dread of saying something that would set the boy's curiosity on the alert. And he was thankful, when the time for school came again, that it was still, so far as he knew, at rest.

But the joy of oblivion, in change of scene and association, grew on him. He left England for the South of France, as we have seen, shortly after Bob departed for Broadstairs the first time, midway in his summer holiday. He wandered about a little in old French towns after Judith returned for her sister's wedding, catching the last half of Bob's Christmas holiday, that youth having spent the first half partly at his grandmamma's and partly in a visit to a school-friend. If you know and understand boys, you will feel no surprise on hearing that this was Tillotson! Bob had a high old time at the Deanery at Incheester to tell his father of when he went to the Hermitage in January. And his spontaneous narratives of the distinguishing features of Incheester and Broadstairs, to the disadvantage of the latter, did more to bring an image of Marianne and her present surroundings to her husband's mind than more carefully prepared statements, substantially true, could have done. Grandmamma was not a stinking old Salvation Army Dissenter, but a properly enrolled member of the Establishment. Nevertheless, Bob's contrast between what he called "her style" and that of the Venerable Dean were full of suggestion to his father, whose imagination could supply the merely academical accuracy needed for a perfect picture.

When Bob went back to school Challis remained at the Hermitage long enough to complete the correction of the proofs of his forthcoming novel for the Spring issue. "The Hangman's Orphan" had been already announced in the press, and only a revise or two was wanting to com-

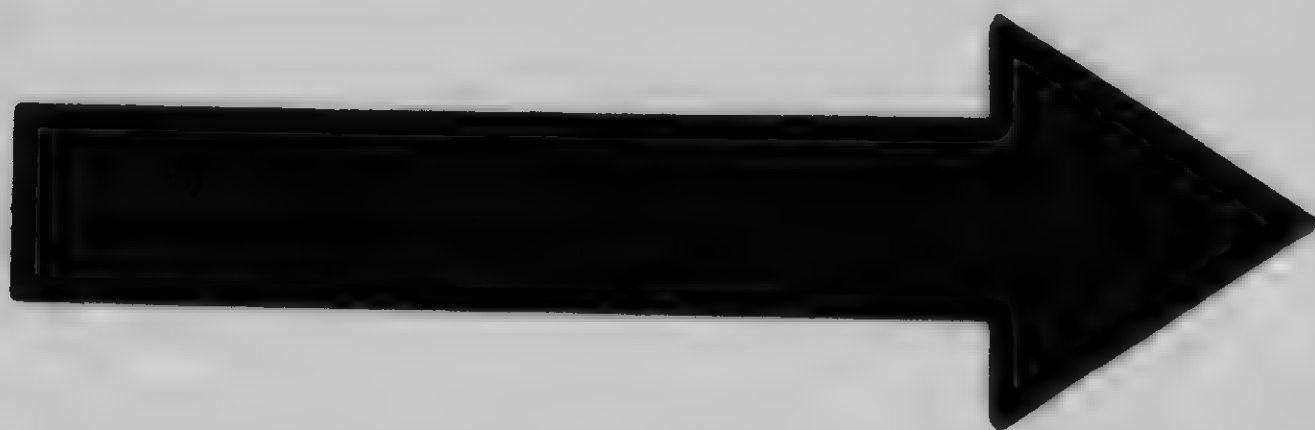
plete it. He arranged that this should be posted to him at Mentone, where he expected to remain through January. He could wire corrections if needful.

Whether his selection of Mentone for a winter sojourn was the result of a suggestion from Judith or not is of little importance to the story. What does concern it is the question how Challis came to be admitted on the family visiting-list at all when he left his card at the Hôtel de la Paix on their arrival. Remember what Sibyl's report may have—must have—been of the little drama she had distinguished in "Tophet" in the moonlight of last June. Certainly Challis had "left cards" in Grosvenor Square once or twice: had, at Judith's suggestion, been engaged elsewhere when once asked to dinner, but had had no real intercourse with any of the Family, except that time when he was caught and brought into the house by Cintilla. Of course, if Judith's hand had been free, things would have been different. Still, something is needed to account for the position of affairs at Mentone. There was certainly a change.

Our own belief is that the brilliant success of a play of our author's at the Megatherium Theatre had a great deal to do with it.

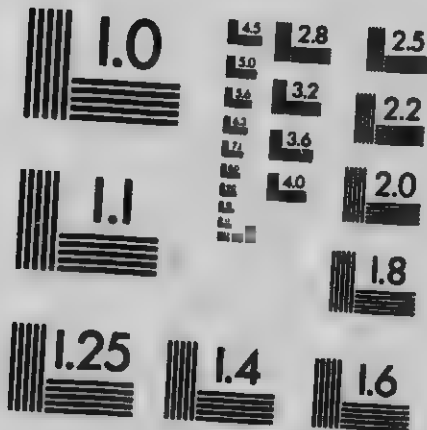
Nice scruples bow before great booms; and although Sibyl's antipathy, shared to a great extent by her mother, and her father's irresolution before their united forces, were obstacles to Miss Arkroyd's perfect freedom of intercourse with that Mr. Challis who had married his Deceased Wife's Sister, and was living apart from her, they were obstacles of a sort liable to disappear under a sufficiently lofty heap of laurels. Even her Grace of Rankshire, who had condemned Challis off-hand, and recommended that the doors of Royd Hall should be closed against him, softened in the Royal box before the thunders of applause that accompanied the call for the author when the curtain fell on "Aminta Torrington." He wasn't Shakespeare, of course; but, then, he wasn't Ibsen, and *what* a comfort that was! And one couldn't stand against a popular verdict. "And, after all," said she to Lady Arkroyd, "we probably only know half the story."

"Well, Thyringia," said Lady Arkroyd, thereon, "you



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know it isn't me that is making the fuss," which was not only bad grammar, but untrue. "If you would say a word to Sir Murgatroyd to influence him, it would have such weight. And then the man could come to a reception or something, and Ju would let me have a little peace. I can't tell you how sick and tired I am of it all."

Whereupon her Grace had attacked the Bart. before the Bishop, to the discomfiture of both; the Bart. because he was really unconscious of any active share in the ostracism of Challis, and only supposed that he was meeting her ladyship half-way; the Bishop because Thyringia seized the opportunity of flouting his lordship on the Deceased Wife's Sister question—trampling on his most cherished episcopal conviction as nothing but a coronet would have dared to do. She chose to ascribe the attitude of Royd towards Challis entirely to his irregular marriage, and "pointed out" that if the legalising Bill passed next year—"and it would, yes!"—the Bart. would look like a fool. "What a parcel of geese you are," said her Grace before a whole roomful of people, "to suppose the man wants to marry Judith! . . . Well! he'll have to look sharp about it, anyhow!" The Bishop turned purple; but there!—a Duchess can say exactly whatever she likes.

No doubt the confidence her Grace expressed that the "legalising Bill" would pass—backed as her opinion was by that of many others—had its fair share of weight. For both Judith's parents, with a probably well-grounded faith that their daughter, if only from self-interest, would do nothing irregular, could not hide from themselves that they would welcome any change that would define the position, and keep the suspected couple permanently apart.

This feeling may well have increased and taken a more heart-felt form when Challis, possibly with the written sanction of Judith—but nothing came out to that effect—made his appearance at Mentone. Lady Felixthorpe and her husband joined the party later. It must have been during their short stay that the little scene occurred so graphically described by the butler to Mrs. Protheroe. This little scene, the news of which reached England a few days before its actors, prepares the story for a change



in its conditions. It has to adapt itself to a new state of things—a state three words of Mr. Elphinstone's narrative suffice to show. Judith is speaking of Challis as Titus.

Had the lonely and reserved young widow with the two little girls, who lived with her mother at Broadstairs, and was called by the few who had occasion to call her anything "Young Mrs. Craik"—had she been told that that other woman, whom she hated as a Choctaw hates a Cherokee—to scalping-point—was actually speaking and thinking of the husband she had renounced by the name the pride of her heart in his first great success in authorship had chosen and kept for him—and, although less frequent in speech than of old, it was the name her own mind still gave him—would it have added anything to her resentment? Would she have been one scrap more miserable than she was, for knowing it? The story has to report otherwise.

As a matter of fact, Marianne would in a sense have welcomed the knowledge. She had made up her mind to kill her love for the father of her children, and it may be she found it died harder than she expected. Did you, who read this, ever have to kill anything larger than an insect you could flatten out in a trice to a mere blot? You may perhaps have caught some bird, maimed by a sportsman—or sportsbooby—past all hope of rising in the wind—just a scrabbled wreck, good for nothing but for a sportscat to get a little joy from—and may have seen that it would be merciful in you, not a sportsperson at all, but a sentimentalist, to make a quick end of it; and then you may have tried, and found it still had heart in it for a fight for life. Did your sentimentalism make you feel sick, till the last last kick left it collapsed and cooling? Then, were you not glad?

Marianne would have been glad to know that her love for Titus was dead, and the killing of it come to an end. But would it die? There was always the painful doubt. Your little dicky-bird ended on a tiny jerk, and hung limp and chill. Would a love those two young folks brought back memories of, hour by hour, do the like?

More than once, Choctaw as she was, her mind had wavered towards relenting. Once she had actually begun

a letter to her husband—not imploring forgiveness for her overstrained anger and jealousy; she was too proud for that sort of thing—but the other sort of thing, the sort that is ready with Christian Forgiveness, the sort that makes the consumption of a good large humble pie a *sin quâ-non*, the sort that indulges in a truculent sort of joy over the sinner that repenteth. She was too proud to admit that she had been at all in fault, but just—only just—not too proud to indulge a secret hope that Titus would be magnanimous enough to shut his eyes to her omission. All she wanted was contrition galore and absolution absolute. On those terms she would come back and marshal Mrs. Steptoe and the crew of a new domestic Argo. Only, bygones were to be bygones! She had a dim sense that this expression was to be held to mean that Charlotte Eldridge was to be assoilzied. It was a dim one, because she had no idea of admitting that she had been influenced by Charlotte.

Her mother dissuaded her from sending this letter, if you call it dissuasion to “point out” that Hell-fire awaits those who run counter to your voice of warning. What Challis would have called the “religious hoots” of the worthy old lady took the form of warning her daughter against returning to what Holy Writ denounced plainly as a Life of Sin. She omitted to mention the chapter and verse; but, then, her style, as Bob called it, was one that lent itself to fervour—not to say bluster—rather than verification of references. It was a style that Bob, backed by his father—and Tillotson’s, for that matter—could easily sneer at. But it was harder for Marianne to ignore the force of the words-without-meaning that had been thundered at her from her cradle. The well-worn phrases had force in them still for her, and when she burned that letter she had a kind of sacred feeling, like the Northern Farmer when he came away from Church.

It is right to mention, lest any reader should condemn Marianne for too great submission to her mother, that the thunderbolts of hereditary superstition were not the only malign influences she had to bear up against. She never lost touch with Charlotte Eldridge. In fact, Charlotte paid her more than one short visit at Broadstairs, and made

the best use of her time in each. Nothing could have exceeded the earnestness of her supplications to her friend to allow her to act as intercessor and mediator, to be the bearer of the olive-branch of peace, except it were the warmth of her exhortations to forgiveness, or the subtle dexterity with which the suggestion of offence still untold weakened the effect of both. It is impossible to enlarge on the merit of overlooking the wrong that has been inflicted on us, without by implication enlarging the area of the wrong itself. Meekness needs something to work with; a buffalo cannot find sustenance from a flower-pot. Charlotte never asked pardon for the offender without contriving to suggest a new offence.

Of course, if Marianne had not been a bit of a Choctaw, the position need never have become so exasperated. But it isn't fair to make her the scapegoat on that account. What a many items of the total imbroglio could have cancelled it, by simply attending to their own non-existence! If, for instance, Judith Arkroyd had kept her eyes to herself, or had never left Challis's hand to do the letting-go—who can say, then, what the exact force of that moonlight adventure in Tophet would have been? Or if that theatrical nonsense had not let witchcraft loose on an easy victim; easy because unsuspecting? Or if Marianne's writing-paper had been the thin sort that goes abroad, eight pages for twopence-halfpenny, instead of that sort the envelope cuts your tongue when you lick it to—Harmood's phraseology, we believe—would not Challis have read the postscript? Think of the difference that would have made!

No!—there is no sense in trying to fix blame; certainly not on either of the principal actors. Blame Judith if you like! But even then, bear in mind that until Challis broke out in that foolish way, Judith had observed all the rules of the game, and was playing fair. Do her justice! Can you gibbet Judith, without affirming that a woman has no right to be beautiful, and very little to take for granted that a man with a still young wife and two children will not credit her with a readiness to assume as a matter of course that he will never imagine that she will suppose he has fallen in love with her. . . . We hope

this is intelligible. More might be added to the same effect, but let it stand.

Judith's father never saw any fault to be found with his daughter's conduct; so why should the story? However, it is true that Sibyl always said that papa was a bat; and her ladyship suggested that, socially speaking, conflagrations might break out all round, and Sir Murgatroyd never notice them until she called his attention to them. When the Duchess said what the story has already reported about Challis and Judith, it only presented itself to him as a sheer joke; his Arcadian mind could not receive the idea of Judith—our Judith!—nourishing a *tendresse* for . . . a married author! It was not the authorship, but the marriage, or marriages rather; for if we considered Marianne null and void, what should we call her residuum? A widower at large, with a doubtful record?

The fact is, the old boy had a fine chivalrous heart behind his occasional absurdities, and any advantage taken of a legal technicality to shuffle out of a deliberate contract would have been branded by him as it deserved. And, although it was quite untrue that he was the maker of the fuss her ladyship disclaimed any hand in, it is certain that he inaugurated a fuss of his own invention after that outbreak of the Duchess, when he heard—to deglutition point—the full story of Marianne's revolt. It had been placed before him some time since in an imperfect form, but he had swallowed barely a mouthful. Now that his wife satisfied the curiosity her Grace's escapade had excited, and gave him full details, he became keen to justify Mrs. Challis, and was for a while secretly intolerant of her husband. He *would* know all about it; and in spite of his informant's appeal to him to be most careful on no account to say anything to Judith, he seized an early opportunity to get at that young lady's version of the subject.

"Oh dear!—that tiresome woman!" was her spoken response. But the kiss she bestowed on her parent's shaving-area was commiserating, tolerant of the enquiry, not absolutely unamused at the Arcadian simplicity of the kisses. Dear old man, leaving his manures and eleventh centuries and things, to meddle with Us and the World! A kiss that said, "What a shame of mamma to

disturb such pastoral tranquillity!" But Judith would keep nothing back, not she! She dropped into the visitor's chair of the Bart.'s sanctum, to tell the tale, throwing her hands in her lap, to lie there till wanted; a sort of despairing submission to lip-boredom to come. "I need not drum through the whole story; it's too silly!" She looked appealingly at her father, who immediately weakened his position of catechist.

"Oh no!—your mother has told me the main facts," said he. And then, perhaps feeling ground lost, added: "At least, I infer so."

"Did she tell you I was supposed to be the heroine of the romance?" Eyes closed for a second on an amused face, reopened to look for the answer. Self-possession perfect!

"Well—yes! She said something of the sort."

"Did she say I was in love with Challis?"

"Certainly not!" Emphatically.

"Well, I don't know! One can't trust one's *madre*. I shouldn't have been the least surprised."

"Oh—hum—well! Very distinguished man...."

"Oh, I like Challis very much. He's a most amusing companion. I wish that fool of a woman wouldn't make him so miserable."

"I understand she took offence at his showing you..."

"Showing me her letter! Yes—just fancy! Why—the letter was as good as a letter to *me*. It was nothing but a message to say why she wouldn't come to Royd.... No, really there was nothing else in it.... Well!—something illegible on the back that he had overlooked. And she would listen to no explanation, and went off in a fury, and took the children with her. And he's never seen her since."

"I can't believe she has any claim to the children. Has he taken legal advice?"

"Oh dear, yes! Heaps. But it seems he can do nothing. She was a half-sister of his first wife, you know. If he had married her in Australia, he might, they said, have got some legal remedy in Australia; but even then they thought he would have had a deal of trouble to get at the children. I think he has done wisely to let it alone."

Frank says the Bill is sure to pass the Lords this year or next; probably this. Then she'll have to be his wife, whether she likes it or not. I've no patience with such folly."

The Baronet assumed the look of intense profundity political males generally wear in the presence of woman-kind, suggesting magazines of thought beyond their shallow comprehension. "Some — very — funny — questions," he said, in judicial instalments, "will arise if that Bill becomes Law. Ve-ry funny ones." But apparently too complex or too delicate for discussion with one's daughters. So the Bart. shut them into his soul with the closed lips of discretion, and looked responsible.

Perhaps Judith saw her way to quenching any suspicions anent herself and Challis by parading her unreluctance to talk about him. "I don't know," said she, "that a little trouble is necessarily bad for Challis, with all this success going on. It may save him from becoming odious. Besides, of course, Marianne means to come back to him in the end."

This was about the time of Sibyl's wedding, shortly after the production of "Aminta Torrington." So convincing was Judith's attitude of her detachment from Challis, helped always by his leaving England immediately afterwards, that all suspicion had vanished from the mind of her parents by the time he made his appearance at Mentone; and at that time Sibyl was honeymooning. There had never been anything that could be called a split. And discretion, for some reason, must have been carefully observed by Challis and Judith during this visit, for gossip never mentioned them in the same breath. And the lady's father, in our opinion, was righteously shocked when it came to his knowledge that his daughter and this gentleman, who had been accepting his hospitality as a married man, were to all intents and purposes plighted lovers, and free to wed without let or hindrance. Except, indeed, on the lady's side, an almost solid phalanx of family opposition; and on the gentleman's a previous marriage which was no legal wedlock at all, but which he could not be said to have been disloyal to, for he had never

either refused to play the husband nor been guilty of any legal infidelity. It was entirely Marianne who had refused to play the wife.

Lord Felixthorpe, Sibyl's coronet, was the only dissident in the family circle. "It certainly seems to me," said he, as deliberately as ever, "that either our Legal Acumen, or our Boasted Civilisation, or our Moral Sense, or the Marvellous Elasticity of our Political System, or Convocation, or the Higher Socialism, or something equally impressive, must be in a sense defective, when any person not convicted of crime is under compulsion to live single, as long as there is a lady willing to marry him. I say nothing of the case of a friend of ours (whom I do not name for obvious reasons) who says that no lady will accept him. If he were to endeavour to drag an unwilling bride to the altar, the police should be instructed to interpose. But in the case of Challis—if I am rightly informed—my fascinating sister-in-law is ready to accept the situation. Now, although, under the existing Law, one's own Deceased Wife's Sister is excluded from the questionable advantage of becoming one's Legitimate Wife, the most stringent morality has never enrolled some one else's Live Wife's Sister among prohibited degrees of consanguinity...."

"Do say what you mean, Frank, instead of going out of your way to make fun of Will, and talking nonsense!"

"I mean, dearest, that it's too much to expect of any fellow that he's to stand his wife bolting on the plea that the wedding-knot wasn't tied, and lugging away his kids, and refusing to see him, and him not be allowed to marry somebody else."

But William Rufus, who had been slighted by an American beauty, and was gloomy in consequence, shook his head and said: "Can't see it—never shall!" And Sibyl settled the matter. "If he wants to marry anybody else's husband's Live Wife's Sister, let him! Only not mine!"

So it had come about that discord reigned in Grosvenor Square when the Family returned from Mentone. But the outer world knew nothing about it. Mr. Elphinstone and Mrs. Protheroe talked of what they heard to each

other, and nothing reached the lower stratum of the household. Conjecture must supply a motive for delay on the part of this betrothed couple: for they must be called so. If they intended to ignore Marianne and defy public opinion, why not do so at once? Was it because no certainty existed that Challis's marriage was invalid? No legal means of dissolving a marriage not recognised by Law seems to exist. It was impossible to make a clean slate and start fair. Who could say that time would be sufficient to calm the family tempest and put the ship in commission so as to be sure of sailing before that Bill was brought forward in the Commons? Suppose it was rushed through, and overtook the wedding! Was Judith's thirst for wedlock intense enough to run such a risk? Was it not, rather, common prudence to wait for the rejection of the Bill, and have a cool year to turn the matter over? Our own impression is that the young lady was not in love enough to say *yes* to the first question, or *no* to the second.

Whether Challis's arrangement of his affairs and his whereabouts—always favouring what Harmood would have called "keeping company," while thrusting himself as little as possible on the Family—was in consequence of a definite plan of campaign, arranged with Judith, is not known to this story. There is a suspicion that the attack of influenza that laid him up at Marseilles on November 6 was made the most of, in order that he might shirk the receipt of knighthood in person on the 9th. There is his name among the Birthday Honours of the year; and, as we all know, he is now Sir Alfred Challis. He was able, somehow, to get enough degrees of fever certified to make his presence at the Palace impossible; but whether he knelt to receive them subsequently, or whether they reached him through the æther, like a Marconigraph, we do not know. He had certainly shaken off the "flu" very completely when he came to England after Christmas.

The story is a bit hazy on many points at this period. What made Challis, with all his impatience with what he called the "performing classes," accept a knighthood? One theory—a plausible one—is that Judith ordered him to do so. Not from any idea that her parents or Sibyl



would soften towards Challis on that account—much they cared for knighthoods! But she was woman enough to wish to have the World on her side. It might be a snobbish world; but what a big one it is! And what a lot of power one's elbow gets from the sympathy of it! Anyhow, to our thought, Challis, having accepted the honour at Judith's bidding, ought to have overcome his reluctance to conform to usage, and not run his temperature up to 103. As it was, the little thermometer had its way.

He remained abroad, then, until the Easter holiday—which coincided, you see, very nearly with the return of the Family to Grosvenor Square—when he came to Wimbledon for some more Bob. All we want to know about him at this time, and for a little time yet, is that his correspondence with Judith continued, and that during the season in London the two of them contrived to meet very frequently. It was a wonder they managed to steer clear of gossip as cleverly as they did.

But an anxious time was approaching. Suppose that Bill passed!...

Did Challis ever say to himself, to put a finishing-touch on the oddity of his position, "What would it matter? If it did put a barrier between me and Judith, would it not give me back my old home and the kids?" The story can conceive his doing so, and also that his mind would then wander back on his old days... not always perfect; but still!... and then would shudder at its own brutality, for never asking what of Judith, in that case? What would be left for *her*? For Challis, though he had speculated a good deal in his writings on the many ways of loving that there are, had scarcely applied his conclusions to himself. Some theorists will have it that no man ever has the slightest consideration for the woman he loves—in one of the ways, mind you!—suppose we say the volcanic way! They hold that it is himself he loves all the time.

However, the Bishop said it was impossible that Bill should pass. And he ought to have known.

## CHAPTER XL

A HOT July was drawing to a close, and Athelstan Taylor and his friend Gus's sister Adeline Fossett were out early in the Rectory garden, and had many things to talk about. It was the Saturday morning of a Friday to Monday visit, which could not be prolonged, on any terms, till Tuesday.

One of the things they had to talk about was sad, as anyone could have told from their voices, without hearing a word distinctly. Because they were speaking with such very resolute cheerfulness of it; putting such a good face on it; each of them evidently thinking the other wanted an ally.

"I go by Sidrophel." It was Athelstan who said this. "Taking a man out of London to live on the south shore of the Mediterranean is like giving meat and drink after a diet of poisons. You'll see Gus's first letters will say he's well. He won't be, of course; one mustn't expect miracles. But it will seem like that—to him."

"I think that's very likely. But when I said I wished I had been able to go with him, I didn't mean that. I don't believe he'll want any coddling or looking after out there. What I was thinking of was the poor boy being so lonely, all by himself." But Athelstan laughed out at this: the idea of a pastor of a flock being *lonely*!—the last thing in the world! The lady admitted this, and helped it a little. "Yes—and, after all, it isn't as if we had seen each other every day when he *was* in London." Then she reflected a little, and added: "Besides, I couldn't have gone, anyhow, because of mother." Of whom this story can report nothing, no questions having been asked. "Mother" must have her place in it as the reason Miss Fossett could not go to Tunis.

Something came to the Rector's mind which provoked a

cheerful laugh. "I suppose," he said, "poor Challis would say we were bringing an indictment against the Almighty."

"I wonder you call him 'poor Challis,' Yorick. I've no patience! I've heard all about it from the other side, you know. But what did you mean he says?" The question is asked stiffly. Challis is evidently not in favour.

"He says that resignation, as practised, always seems to be meant as an indictment against the Almighty. It's true he said he was referring to venomous resignation. We must hope ours is t'other sort."

"I won't laugh at anything Mr. Challis says, Yorick. I've no patience with a man who behaves so to his wife. My cousin Lotty knew the whole thing from the beginning, and it's quite impossible she should be mistaken. . . . Oh yes!—I know what you're going to say. That little bit of Latin . . ."

"Well!—it's a very good little bit, as far as it goes. *Audi alteram partem!* Nobody ever bursts from bottling up his judgment until he has heard both sides."

"My dear Yorick, I agree with you *absolutely* about the principle, as a general rule. But in this particular case I do think you are unreasonable. How is it possible Lotty should be mistaken, when Mrs. Challis is actually living at her mother's at Tulse Hill? Oh no! I do think you're quite wrong!"

"But I'm only refusing to form an opinion. I'm not expressing one."

"Well, if you don't see that Mr. Challis *must* be in the wrong, you never will see it. Don't be ridiculous and paradoxical, Yorick dear, because you know perfectly well you agree. Now don't you?"

"Can't say I do." And the conversation ran for some distance on the same pair of wheels, the lady always maintaining that in this one particular case suspension of opinion, pending production of evidence, is the merest affectation, and the gentleman resolutely refusing to make any exceptions. However, Miss Fossett had not produced all her arguments.

"Besides, Yorick dear, you know Mr. Challis *did* tell you

all his side of the story." A head-shake. "No!—well, he had the opportunity of telling you, and he didn't, which is the same thing."

"No—no, Addie, not the same thing—not the same thing! You know I had a long talk twice with him about it. I went to see him on purpose, and neither time would he say a single word in self-defence..."

"Because he couldn't!"

"Oh no—no! Indeed, you're unfair to him. When I say *audi alteram partem*, in this case, I really mean wait till we are certain we have heard all there is to be said on the other side. I am as sure as that I am standing here that the poor chap was tongue-tied by chivalry to his wife. I wish she would have seen me when I went..."

"You did go?"

"Oh yes—I went at once after seeing him, and only succeeded in seeing her mother, a horrid, religious old woman..."

"Yorick dear!"

"Well—you know what I mean. The old woman as good as told me I was a disgrace to my cloth, because I spoke of marriage with a deceased wife's sister as an open question. You know that question comes into Challis's affair—comes very much in..."

"I know. I know all about it. Only it's not the chief part... a... but you know, of course?"

"Yes—yes!—what it *was*—of course!" And then each nods and looks intuitive. If Charlotte Eldridge had been watching them then through a telescope, she would have been able to spot the exact moment at which a lady and gentleman—an unsanctioned brace, that is—came on the *tapis*.

How far can they be legitimately discussed—by us who know the lady? That's the point! Miss Fossett bites a thoughtful lip about it. Mr. Taylor utters a succession of short "hm's" and one long one; then says in a by-the-way manner that accepts a slight head-shake as an answer: "Didn't Judith Arkroyd speak to you?... Oh, I fancied she did;" adding, in a reserved tone of voice: "You know, I dare say, that she herself wrote to Mrs. Challis." And this speech seems to have the singular effect of removing a padlock from Adeline Fossett's tongue.

"Handsome Judith?" she says, oddly lighting on Mari-  
anne's term for her *bête noire*. "Oh, I know!—I quite  
understand."

"But *what* do you understand? Come, Addie dear,  
don't be . . . don't be *female* about it. Do say what!"

The impression or suggestion that she might have  
married which we fancy this story referred to when she  
first came into it seemed to mellow and mature in Miss  
Fossett as she replied, "Oh, Yorick, dear old boy! What  
an Arcadian shepherd you are!" And then she laughed,  
and repeated, "Handsome Judith!"

"But she showed me the letter—she showed me the  
letter!" cries the Rector, in a kind of frenzy with his friend  
for her persistence in being female, as he calls it. "Come,  
Addie, what could she do more?"

The above-named suggestion seems to mature until it  
all but insinuates that Adeline might marry still, if she  
chose. The thought just reaches the Rector's mind, and  
leaves it as she repeats, in answer to his question, "What  
more, indeed? But what did she say, I should like to  
know?"

"Ah!—that's the point. And we think we're going to  
be told, do we?" The Rector laughed a big good-  
humoured laugh. He detects in himself, and is puzzled  
by it, a new-born disposition to treat Addie as if she were  
in her teens, entirely caused by her excursion into feminine  
paths hard to explain or classify.

But she unexpectedly forms square to repulse patronage;  
harks back, as it were, to her thirties or forties—scarcely  
the latter yet—and says gravely, "No, dear old boy! I  
won't try to pry into any confidence. Don't tell me  
anything."

"I would as soon tell you as anyone"—he is looking at  
his watch—"a . . . yes . . . sooner than anyone—now Gus  
is gone." If the last four words had not been spoken, a  
hearer—Mrs. Eldridge, say—might have built an interest  
on what had preceded them. Those four made the speech  
fraternal.

Miss Fossett had come to Royd Rectory to pay a visit  
of consolation, following close on her brother's recent

departure for Tunis. But it was also a visit to Lizarann. Her affection for the child was manifest from the fact that, when she arrived last night, before ever she ate a scrap of anything, after all that long journey, she went to look at her where she was asleep. It was nurse who made this mental note, and who remarked also, when Miss Fossett left the child's bedside, that she looked that upset you quite noticed it. Also that when the visitor said, "Is she always like that?" she seemed asking to enquire, like.

"And what did you say, Ellen?" said Miss Caldecott, in nurse's confidence. "I hope you didn't frighten Miss Fossett."

"Oh no, miss! I was careful not. I said the doctor took a most favourable view, and had all along. I told what he said about perspirations, and not to take too much account of temperatures, and improving symptoms. Oh no, I wasn't likely!" And Ellen is a little wounded at the bare suggestion that she should have any such a thing—her own phrase in speech with another confidante next morning.

And yet Miss Fossett *was* frightened! And when the Rector's voice intercepted the above colloquy from below, saying, "Bessy, come down and tell Addie what Dr. Pordage said about Lizarann," it was because Miss Fossett had gone to her very late refection quite white, and had said, referring to her visit upstairs, "Why, my dear Yorick, the little thing's in a perfect bath of perspiration! And' then she only had a little soup, and Cook took away the things, because Rachel had gone to bed with a tooth-ache.

However, next day in the sunshine, walking through the fields with the children to pay a visit to Lizarann's Daddy at Mrs. Fox's, she felt encouraged when she saw the little person running about in the highest spirits, gathering blackberries, with a beautiful faith that her Daddy would appreciate them.

"That wasn't a coft at all, Teacher," said Lizarann, when taxed with coughing. "I didited it myself."

"Then *that* was!"

"Only because I very nearly stumbled down," said Lizarann. She had a high colour in her cheeks, and her

eyes looked very large, and her face wasn't thin—only her fingers. But her spirits were all that could be desired; so Miss Fossett had to be content with hoping all would go well, if she was stuffed with preparations of malt, and syrup of hypophosphites, and so on. But how about the winter? Was there no possible Tunis? For Miss Fossett's affection for the small waif went any lengths in projected antidotes to phthisis. If it was money that was the difficulty—well!—Yorick would have to get it from Sir Murgatroyd; none of his conscientious nonsense!

However, it might be all unnecessary. Just look at the child tearing down the hill with Phoebe, to get to her Daddy three minutes sooner, and shouting out "Pi-lot!" in defiance of orders. And such an *accolade* as she gave her father did not look, at this distance, at least, like either extract of malt or hypophosphites.

Miss Fossett intended to make use of this visit to Jim to get from him, if she could, some information about the medical record of Lizarann's family. She had the old-fashioned faith that consumption is hereditary. It would be very nice to hear that it had never shown itself among her little *protégée's* ancestors. She had herself seen very little—almost nothing—of the blind man, and was curious to make his acquaintance, after hearing so much of him from the Rector.

Jim was not in the summer-house, but in Mrs. Fox's kitchen that opens on the garden. It is lucky none of the party is six-foot-six. But there is plenty of room, laterally.

Jim has to remind Lizarann of her social duties. "Ye'll have to name the good lady for me to know, little lass." And Lizarann shouts out "Teacher!" vehemently.

"Miss Fossett, at the school, you know, Mr. Coupland," says the owner of the name. "Lizarann's one of my best pupils, and she's going to get quite strong." There was an error in tact here; she should have recollected that Jim would be a stranger to the medical discussions over his child's lungs. A slight misgiving crossed her mind.

"Quite strong—the lassie? Aye, to be sure!" says Jim in a puzzled sort of way. But the lassie herself supersedes the point, doing violence to the conversation. "So's Daddy's leg," she says, wrenching in a topic of greater

importance. "Daddy's going to walk on it, quite strong, more than free miles, and no scrutches. Yass!"

Certainly no conversation such as Miss Fossett wished for would be possible as long as the children were here. Consultation with Mrs. Fox developed a scheme for their temporary suppression.

Suppose the two young ladies and Lizarann—the distinction is always nicely marked—were to go with her just three minutes' walk up at the back of the house to see the swarm of bees in Clyst's orchard. The supposition is entertained, and they go.

Miss Fossett admits to Jim that she has covertly sanctioned and encouraged this move, that tranquillity should ensue. But she nearly repented, she says, when she heard of the bees, lest they should sting. She hopes it's all right? Oh yes, Lord bless her, that's all right enough! Jim will go bail for the bees. Look, he says, at the many a chance they've had to get a turn at him in his summer-house—he seems to have appropriated it—and never gave him a thought! Besides, Jarge would be there, and he'd say a word to the bees and tell them.

"Ye see, mistress," Jim continued, "it's a trade with Jarge. He's a bee-master—so they call him—or you might say a bee-doctor; the folk round about send for him, miles."

"I want to talk about Lizarann directly," said Miss Fossett. "But tell me about George and the bees."

"Ah, Lizarann! . . . But I can tell about the bees, and soon done with. It was marlal queer about George, when he was a youngster. The bees nigh stung him to death, for pinching of 'em inside the deep flowers when he got a chance. They were making a mistake, though; for it wasn't he did it, but another young shaver of his inches. So they cast about for to make him some amends."

"You don't mean they found out their mistake?"

"Ah, but I do! They're a sly race, and full of knowledge. How they did it between them I can't say, but there it is!—they've come to the understanding. And what's the queerer is that George himself don't above half-understand what's said to him by a Christian. It's only bees he can tackle! . . . What was you kindly going to say about Lizarann?"



Miss Fossett, rendered cautious by the lapse she had so nearly made, saw no way of approaching the subject she was curious about. So she chatted on about Lizarann, hoping it might come into their talk accidentally. Jim was eloquent about his gratitude for all that had been done for himself and his child. "But for you and the master," said he, "I'd have been selling matches in the streets still. That was before my accident. But you won't say anything of that to my lassie." His hearer understood him. No—she would say nothing of his begging days to Lizarann. He thanked her again. "But," he added, "I wish you and the Rector-gentleman could have seen me eight year ago—no!—barely seven year. I might have been grateful to some kind of purpose then. I'm little use now!" Pride without a trace of vanity was in his voice as he added: "There was a fine man in my place in those days, and you'd ha' said so, lady." The waste remnant was speaking of its former self.

Adeline Fossett succeeded in none of the things she tried to say. It did not matter. He would be sure to talk of the past, and she would glean all she wanted. He took for granted, as part of the conversation in the interim, the fact of his wife's death.

"That was it, ye see: her mother died. She would have been the eldee!"

"I understand. The little one herself told me of your accident, and how you came back..."

"Aha!—my little lass! In coorse she would tell it! And she told about the Flying Dutchman, I'll go bail." Jim laughed joyously at the image his mind formed of Lizarann telling her inherited legend dramatically. As to the incredulity, he knew it would exist in some minds; so let it pass! "I came back, lady," he continued, "and I found Lizarann. But I was all in the dark, and no sight of my wife's face. And there was no hiding it from her about my eyes—no chance! I never ought to have gone a-nigh the house. But she might have died, too..."

"You mean she would not have recovered, perhaps, if you *had* stopped away."

"Ah—if I had, ever so! But I was mazed with the longing to hear my girl's voice again, and maybe I never

gave her the thought I should have done. I was a bad young man in those days, and suited myself when I might have done others a turn, many's the time. It's over and done with now." And his old self had vanished with it; so completely that the voice of its derelict, now speaking, had no consciousness in it of the way his narrative affected his hearers, as he continued, replying to a word of enquiry from her: "My accident—ye'll have heard all that from the lassie! My mates, they got me off to the Hospital, and the doctor there, he dressed my face. And, do ye know, mistress, it wasn't till the dressings and strappings was removed I knew that I was blind. Nor my mates. And they had to tell me—mind you!—that the last strap was off. I couldn't have guessed it. I was thinking I should see. But it was all dark, and the doctor, he says: 'Sorry for you, my lad, but the sight's gone. Ask 'em in London; they'll tell you the same.' So my mates, they brought me away; and there was the sun, by the heat. But I could only see black and I judged the doctor would be in the right of it, in the end. My mate Peter Cortright, he says, 'Never you fret, Jim; it'll all come right. Give 'em a week or so, and wear a pair o' blue spectacles a while, and you'll soon be forgetting all about it.' So I says to him, 'What did old Sam Nuttall say ten days a-gone?'"

"What did Peter say?" asked Miss Fossett.

"Well, ye see, Peter, he *knew*! My ship's owners, out at Cape Town, they were sorry, but in course no responsibility lay with them. I'd myself to blame. They gave me my passage home, and home I came, in the dark! Aboard of an old screw-collier from Liverpool, one o' the sarts they call 'tramps.' Not fit for sarvice, and underhanded. And on to that dysentery, and half the crew down in their berths, doctorin' each other the best they might. Well!—I'll tell ye." Jim seems amused at this narration. "I was passing the time nigh to the binnacle, where the master and a young man with a fractured arm were steering at the wheel; for the rudder-chains, they'd fouled and got jammed, and there was nothing for 'em but to run a file through 'em and iree the rudder, so they could work the starn-wheel, kept as a resarve. Ye see? . . . Well!—the

master, he'd been thirty-eight hours at it, and he just gave out. So I made bold to suggest he should go to his berth, and I should put a bit of force on the handles, and young O'Keeffe—that was the young man's name—had a pair of eyes in his head, and we'd make it out between the two of us. 'Keep her off two points when you see the flash-light,' says the master, and off he goes to his berth. And from then on, mistress, ye'll believe I did a stroke of work at that wheel, just clapping on at the given word. But that's the last bit of work, to call *work*, ever I did, or ever I shall do this side o' the grave." Jim's voice rang its saddest note till now, over the dire knowledge that had come to him that the joy of work could never be his again.

Miss Fossett thought, in the silence that followed, that Jim was dwelling on thoughts of old times brought back by his old story. The fact was that her unfortunate reference to Lizarann "getting quite strong" had been slowly gathering force in a mind that found it hard to receive, and was beginning to call aloud for explanation. He began uneasily: "When you mentioned, lady, just now..." and stopped.

She saw what he meant, and saved him further words. "About Lizarann's health?" she said.

"Ah! Is anything amiss?"

"Oh no—nothing *amiss*!" She had begun too confidently. She had to retract somewhat. But there was nothing to cause the least uneasiness. A fatal word that! She saw its marked effect on Jim, and, though she felt about for some reassuring phrase that would not suggest the question, "Why reassure?" she found nothing she felt confident of getting to the end of successfully. When she did begin, Jim cut her short:

"Are ye keeping something back from me, lady?" His voice was firm and collected.

Adeline Fossett saw that it would have to be told in the end, and Jim would have to bear it. Better to rely on his manhood, but make the least of it. She replied with what was effectively an admission that something had been kept back. She said that the Rector had wanted to tell Jim the whole story at once, and exactly what the doctor had

said, but Miss Caldecott had dissuaded him. What the doctor had said came to no more than this—that the child would want a good deal of care while she was growing. This phrase, which she had invented for the occasion, seemed good to her; it implied such confidence that Lizarann would grow. She decided against repeating the doctor's exact phrase, "She'll outgrow it with care—oh yes!" as it seemed to her somehow weaker, as a hopeful expression.

Jim was very silent over it, and Miss Fossett felt that nothing would be gained by fragmentary attempts to soften her main fact. Having said it, best leave it to be looked in the face. If it could be safely diluted, the Rector's testimony could be relied on to do that later. Rather than dwell on the subject, she preferred to wonder why the bee-inspection was so long on hand.

"I'm thinking maybe the young folk are too many for the old mother," said Jim. "But I doubt we shall hear the lassie sing out one o' these minutes." Then he went on quietly asking questions about Lizarann; as how long had the "uneasiness" been felt; to which the true answer, which was not given, would have been, "from the beginning." For Dr. Ferris's stethoscope had not given an absolutely clean bill to the child's left lung. Then, what did the Rector himself really think? "Would he be minded to tell me himself, if I made bold to ask him?" said Jim.

"Tell you at once, of course!" said Miss Fossett. "He would have talked about it before, only he didn't want to alarm you. Next time you see him, ask him." This was much the best line to go on. But it was rather a relief when the bee-party came back, elevated by natural history, and anxious to impart new discoveries. "I never did shouted out 'Pi-lot,'" said Lizarann, "because Teacher said not to." And she was rather offensively vainglorious over this achievement, referring to it more than once.

When Miss Fossett returned to the Rectory, she said to Athelstan Taylor: "A nice mess I've made of it, Yorick!" Said Yorick then, laughing: "What's the rumpus?"

"I've told Jim Coupland about Lizarann's chest."

"Hm-hm-hm! Ah well!—he's got to know. How did he take it?"

"Very well—but . . ."

"But, of course! Never mind, Addie. Don't you fret. I'm going round that way after lunch, and I'll call and see Jim."

This was about a month after Challis and his wife parted. But is it necessary to synchronize the events of the story so closely?

## CHAPTER XLI

If you stand up at the rifle-butts when they are not shooting, and look away from Royd village towards the Hall, you will see a sharp curve in the road, maybe a mile from Mrs. Fox's cottage on your left. You will identify that by the little shop built out from it towards the road, and the covered arbour where Jim smoked his pipe, over a year ago now at the date of the story. He continues to do so when not professionally employed. For Jim found an employment, strange to say, shortly after he talked to Adeline Fossett about Lizarann's health, and got his first scare about his little lass.

It is just within that curve of the road that his vocation is plied. Not for gain—nothing so low as that! His is an official appointment, in the gift of the Rector of Royd, and there is a parish fund of ij shillings a month, with the additional emolument of a fat capon at Christmas, for the man at the well-head. The Charity Commissioners have never found it out; and the Rector has long since appropriated the fund, and turned it into four shillings, with appendices and addenda; while a composition has been effected in the matter of the capon, the holder of the office receiving instead as much barker as is good for him, all the year round, whether actively employed or not. For the employment Jim had the luck to step into is one that may have to be suspended during hard winter weather, being, in fact, the turning of the well-handle whenever applicants come for water.

It was through Miss Fossett hearing that tale of Jim's, about how his blind strength had come in so mighty handy in that steerage business aboard of the undermanned coal-tramp. She recollected it when, on the afternoon of next day, it came out that the office of water-drawer was vacant, the last man at the well-head having retired at eighty-

seven years of age. Not that he had turned the handle himself for a long time past. He had only given official sanction to the efforts of customers ; who, when very small, had to way-ut till soombody else coom for t' wa-ater. Obviously, Jim was made for the place, and the place for Jim. And he—poor chap !—for whom all personal life had merged in solid gloom and hampered movement, felt like the prisoner in solitary confinement whom the be threw his pegtop and string to, through the bars.

It is hardly a fair comparison, though, for the lonely gaol-bird had to spin his top with never a soul to speak to, day or night, and Jim had constant intercourse with his species ; for as soon as the cottagers round became alive to the fact that they could send little Mary or Sally with a pail to t' wa'all, with a reasonable chance of return in half-an-hour, his services were in constant requisition. Royd village is at least five hundred feet higher than Grime ; and the light soil, though good for the beech-woods, is bad for the water-supply. That is why the Abbey Well, so-called, has a clear bucket-shoot of fifty fathoms before it strikes the water. So, even in answer to Jim's effective appeals, the supply came slowly ; and there was plenty of time, before the responsible bucket came in sight, to hear family history from Mary or Sally, or the latest news from seniors with two large pails stirruped on a shoulder-saddle.

Besides, there was Jim's chief resource, to which all these were as nothing. There was his little lass. Whenever she was not complying with the Education Act, and whenever the weather permitted, the child was pretty sure to be with her father in the little semi-enclosure, half-hidden by hawthorns, where the well with its interesting parclose—some of it as old as the thirteenth century, if you choose—tempts the passing excursionist to stop and be antiquarian for five minutes ; and to put a little jewel of a memory in some close corner of his brain, to be found there on a winter's night in the days to come, when all the excursions are over and the merry year is dead.

The fine warm months that followed Jim's entry on his duties were surely the halcyon months of his broken life. Because for all that he and Lizarann, with a sort of ex-

nost-*facto* optimism, had decided to construct an image of her glorious past from their memories of Bladen Street and Tallack Street, misgiving of the soundness of its materials would creep into his mind, at least ; never to the child's. That image was all beaten gold and ivory to her. Tallack Street, that would have seemed to you and me a sordid avenue of hovels, grudgingly complying with a Building Act, and enclosing imperfectly a rich atmosphere of Lower Middle Class families, was to Lizarann an illuminated stage on which moved the majestic figures of the heroes of her past, into which flitted at intervals visions of delights now extinct : organs with a monkey, that played slow, not to tax the nervous system of their obsessor ; organs without, that played quick, so you could dance to it—played music-hall airs that had three phases apiece, and lent themselves to being done over and over again, and nobody any fault to find ; the man with the drum that couldn't raise his voice to holler, and potatoes he run out of unless you looked sharp ; and, above all, that pre-Wagnerian contrivance without a name, that you could set on and go round for a halfpenny all through the tune, and no cheating—so "Home, Sweet Home" was more popular than the National Anthem, along of the hextry at the end. And the high-road itself, that took two policemen to get them children safe acrost after Board-School ! What a scene of maddening—more than Parisian—gaiety it was Saturday nights ! And what a mysterious antechamber to some Institution undefined, but with a flavour of Trinity House or the Vatican, was that corner where it was wrote up, "Vatted Rum, fivepence-halfpenny !"

Jim lent himself, you may be sure, to gilding these remnants of hygone glory, whatever doubts he may have felt about them himself. Through that happy season when Lizarann could be so frequently his companion—for Dr. Sidrophel said the child couldn't be too much in the air : it would do her good rather than otherwise—recollections of Tallack Street and Vatted Rum Corner rang the changes on tales of the high-seas and the Flying Dutchman. Lizarann had never seen the sea ! Wouldn't she just like to it ! Patience ! Lizarann was to see the sea in time.

Her domicile at the Rectory came to an end a week or



so after her Daddy got his appointment. It had begun with what was intended to be a stay long enough to get rid of that bad inflammatory cold caught in London; had been prolonged at the petition of Phoebe and Joan till that half-a-mile-off tea-party at Royd Park. After this it consisted of postponements, due to reluctance that she should run risks from moving till quite strong again, but growing shorter and shorter as Dr. Pordage laid more and more stress on the definite character of the chest-delicacy, and the modern belief in its communicability. And the fact was that Aunt Bessy, and, indeed, the Rector, were not a little ill at ease about the constant association of the children. The Rector tried to fence with his own uneasiness, and made but a poor show.

"I don't know!" said he to his sister-in-law. "Only a few years since doctors were treating the idea with derision. Now it's all the other way. You never know where to have 'em—never!"

"Do as you like, Athel! But I'm for being on the safe side, if you ask me." And the Rector was obliged to admit to himself that accepting the advice that enjoins caution is a very different thing from running a risk on permission given. The doctor said that if all disorders were accounted infectious until the contrary was shown to be the case, it would be a good thing for the public, but a bad one for the profession and the bacilli. A man must live. So must a bacillus, from his point of view.

Discussion was afoot at one time about the possibility of sending Lizarann to Tunis, where the ex-incumbent of St. Vulgate's would take her in hand and look after her. He was sending highly-coloured reports of his own progress. But these schemes never fructified. The fact, though it was admitted, that it would have been an excessive interpretation of Samaritan good-nature had less to do with their rejection than the inevitable separation of the child from her father. "She'll never come back to England if she goes," said Dr. Sidrophel; meaning that she would only be safe in Africa if she did outgrow her symptoms. But would she be sure to outgrow them?—said Athelstan Taylor, Miss Fossett, and Miss Caldecott, all at once. "That's more than I would swear to," said the doctor.

It was a relief, because you know what a stiff job this sending patients abroad is. Most of us do.

But, short of sending Lizarann to be nursed in an anti-tubercular climate, everything was done for her that could have been done in Samaria itself, with additions up-to-date, such as ozone, peptone, hypophosphites, and several other "ites" and "ones."

So dexterously was her removal to Mrs. Fox's cottage brought about that neither she nor her Daddy ever had a suspicion of the truth. Obviously, so everyone thought, the reason was that she should guide her Daddy to the well-head every morning before going to school, and bring him back in the evening. Lizarann's rejoicing over her importance made up to her for her separation from Phoebe and Joan. The whole manoeuvre was executed without a mishap, and Lizarann started in the summer weather to install her Daddy in safety, and to return for him in the course of the afternoon, duly calling out "Pi-lot!" at a chosen point. Phoebe and Joan gave her up with reluctance, but acknowledged the force of the reasons for the change. They were plausible.

Mrs. Fox put her to sleep in a sweet little room under the thatch, with a lattice-window you could stand open and hear the wind in the trees all night. And a bed with a white tester and a fringe, and a white vallance all round underneath. Only the curtains were chintz, with roses done on them, shiny-like; and the counterpane was made of pieces of everything sewn together. Wherever anyone could have got 'em all from, Lizarann couldn't think.

From underneath which counterpane the occupant of that bed continued an early riser throughout those three satisfactory months. Because Lizarann had nothing the matter with her. Ridiculous! Why shouldn't she cough if she chose? That was her view. And why shouldn't she go to the window to see how the sunflower was getting on! The sunflower grew on a giant plant that had shot up flush with the roof—a record in growth. Lizarann looked out at it every morning, and wondered how big ever *was* it going to get. She didn't know which she liked best, the back or the front of that sunflower. Sunflower-backs are very fascinating.

She had a little triumph over her Daddy and Mrs. Forks about that window. For they belonged to the old school of nursing, which went for suffocation, and had told her not to go to the window at six in the morning in her nightgown. Dr. Sidrophel, when appealed to, said: "Hurt you to go to the open window? Not a bit of it! More open windows the better!" So Lizarann kept on looking out at it until the rime frostis come in October; and then Jarge coot it off for her, not too nigh up to the coop, and Lizarann's prevision that it would be as big as her head was shown to be very, very far short of truth.

"There, now, Daddy," said the convalescent, on her way to the well, with her convoy in tow, after Dr. Sidrophel had endorsed the views of the new school so vigorously. "Dr. Spiderophel said I was-s-s-s-S quite well!" The climax of a prolonged sibilant, *crescendo*, burst like a shell against the coming initial, and stung its adverb to vigorous action.

"Who said you warn't, lassie?" said her father, affecting indignation.

"Phoebe and Jones. And Mr. Yorick, he's always for asking what did the doctor said."

"Vary right and proper, little lass! Wouldn't ye have him know? Nay-tur-ally, such a good gentleman likes to know you're well. That's where the enquiring comes in. He'd be martal sorry to hear the lassie was ill. What do ye make out the young ladies said?" Jim's tactics of raising false issues were compatible with an attempt at a side-light on public opinion.

"Phoebe and Jones said—nurse said—Dr. Spiderophel said"—here concentration became necessary—"that simpsons was favourable, but to continue the medicine two stable-spoonfuls free times a day." She then corrected herself, as though the pronunciation might vitiate the treatment. "No!—*three* times a day." And added corroboratively, "Yass!"

Jim knew that the sky-sign of an engineering firm in the neighbourhood of Tallack Street was responsible for a confusion of the little lass's ideas, or at least speech. He accepted the name, to escape discussion, saying: "If Simpson's is favourable, and the medecine's nice, what

more can a lassie want? In coorse you're quite well, with such like medecine. When little lass's medecine's nasty, that's when they're ill."

Optimism in any form was welcome on such an autumn morning, with such a many larks afloat in the blue above the shorn stubble-fields—more songs than Lizarann could count, in token of a million more unheard—and the Royd church-bell striking seven a mile off, and some sheep-bells making it difficult to hear if it struck right; and the same bees as last month making the same noise about an entirely new supply of honey. Besides, Daddy had to be guided through the sheep, who were filling up the road on ahead, and repeating themselves sadly, though in a variety of keys. Sheep ought never to come in the opposite direction, because no dog can influence them to leave other people space to pass. This time they would have been enough alone to knock medical discussion on the head, even if there had been no other distracting combinations.

During just that fine perfect autumn time no one who was not in the confidence of that useless implement of Dr. Sidrophel's, that you could neither play on nor see through, would have picked out Lizarann as a patient at all. The change came with the chill of the year. Not the first morning frost of all; that, when it scatters diamond drift, every speck of which means to be a mirror to the great sun it knows is coming—coming from beyond the Eastern red, to quench the glow of the Morning Star—is but a fall of temperature, with repentance to follow. It is all right again after breakfast. But the real chill of the year comes soon—too soon! And then there is sunshine at Westminster; and it's going to snow, and does it. And you have fires, and catch cold.

It all happened just as usual that year. Only something had gone wrong with Lizarann. She was no longer the Lizarann of Tallack Street, to whom the first frost that meant business, the first fog that meant to interrupt it, the first fire we did without and the first we didn't—a day or five minutes later, according to our powers of endurance—were one and all mere annual incidents, fraught with holly and mistletoe and intensification of butchers.

In those days Lizarann's greeting to winter was to go out in the snow and avail herself of it as ammunition, or develop it as slides. In these, as often as not it was doubtful whether she would be allowed out at all. And even if it was only to the little schoolroom near the church, not unless she was wropt up real careful, and her red woollen comforter round and round and round, like that. The way was never so in Tallack Street.

Lizarann herself confused between cause and effect. She ascribed her cough to mixtures, and a place in her chest, that prevented her coughing and done with it, to its location by that malign little stethoscope. It was either that or the linseed meal of Teacher's careful slow poulticing that had done it all. She considered that the linseed meal had penetrated through that vermilion disc on the area she called her chest, which had afforded her such unmixed amusement seen in Miss Fossett's little hand-mirror. She was haunted by the flavour of that linseed meal; was convinced it had got through and stuck. But these were views she kept to herself. She tolerated the strange scientific fancies and fallacies of the grown-up world, recognising in them the benevolence of its intentions.

But the something that had gone wrong never made any real concession. It seemed to have made up its mind which direction it would take, and jogged on without remorse. Now and again it may have sat down by the roadside, and set the credulous a-thinking that it might turn back and start again and go right; but it always went on again refreshed in the end. Sometimes it travelled slowly—came to a hill, perhaps? But the road was a give-and-take road, only just a little more downhill than up. It always is, in this complaint.

Dr. Sidrophel gave the Rector very little hope of any real success. He did not say the child would die. Nobody ever says that. He only said she would never make old bones. He probably thought her skeleton would not reach its teens. He continued the treatment; was in favour of plenty of air, plenty of nourishment. the last new chemical *elixir vitæ*—wasn't it called "Maltozone," and didn't every teaspoonful contain an ox from Argentina?—and so on. The cottage smelt of iodine; and dear old Mrs. Fox's

lozenges, which had been active in the early stages of the complaint, had to die away before the new agencies and real prescriptions that had to go to the village apothecary to be made up. Even so the parish engine, that the fire took no notice of, has to give way to the brigade from the nearest station. If only the metaphor would hold good a little farther! If only the parallel could be found for the efficiency of the waterblast that comes so swiftly on the heels of their arrival—steam at high-pressure panting to show its elasticity to advantage—blood-horses that have touched the last speed-record—serpent-coils of hose that mean salvation; if only the latest rescue-powers of Science were on all fours with these! But... Well!—we must hope.

When Sir Rhyscombe Edison, the great London physician, paid a visit to the Hall just before the Family started to go abroad—no one was ill there: it was the head of Thanet Castle he was summoned to consult about—Lady Arkroyd begged him to overhaul a little patient she and the Rector were interested in. He made as careful an examination of Lizarann as he had done of the Duke; was as encouraging to the one patient about her chest as he had been to the other about his hemiplegia; and was nearly as explicit in his second verdict to her ladyship and the Rector as he had been in his first to the family at Thanet. It was a well-marked characteristic case, but one lung was free, so far; and as long as that was so the duration—by which he meant the duration of the patient—was a thing the ablest pathologist in the world could not pronounce upon. The little thing might live to be an old woman—at Davos. He instanced cases of one-lung life in the high Alps going on to old age. But in England, no!... Still, she might go on for a year or so. Sea-air would be the best thing. Anywhere on the south coast.

Do not suppose that any means were left undiscussed that could be reasonably entertained of sending Lizarann to live by the sea. The higher Alps did not come into practical politics. But there were sea-possibilities. Enquiry discovered nursing homes, havens of convalescence, where a very moderate payment would obtain sea-breezes and good food and medical supervision for a patient either

curable or doomed—either would do. But the separation of the child from her father would have been almost inevitable. The thing worked out so ; all details would want too much telling. Besides, Lizarann's friends flinched from sending her to live among "cases" confessed and palpable. It had too much of the character of surrender. How could the truth be softened to her father, if it came to that ?

It had come out through Mrs. Fox, who held a roving commission to tell Jim things gradually, that a scheme was under consideration for packing off both together, father and daughter, to a cottage by the seaside. It had been pronounced quixotic, and condemned, before Mrs. Fox had an opportunity to report its effect on Jim ; so what she told of had no influence in procuring its rejection. But it made its impracticability less to be regretted.

"It would just be like to carry on, Mr. Coupland." So the old woman, extenuating absence from Royd in any form. "It might be a bit lonesome, and I would miss your pipe of an evening—so I tell 'ee ! But what is three months, after all, when you come to name it ?" Mrs. Fox, with true tact, ignored the main evil, the cause of the whole, and chose her own loss as the thing to dwell upon.

"It's not a big turnover of time," said Jim. A moment after he said, referring back : "That's very kind of ye, mother, about the pipe. Thank ye kindly !"

"You've no need to thank me, Mr. Coupland. All the fill-out of the smoke's away up the big chimney in the thoroughdraft, when there's a bit of flare to help it. I like to watch it find its way. Summer-time the gap of the little window scarcely favours the letting of it out. More by token, too, I can mind the many that's gone, by the very smell. My husband, he would always have a yard o' clay . . . ah !—that name he gave it. . . ."

"I know 'em, mother. Churchwa'ardens they call 'em."

"That sort. And my Daniel, he'd none of 'em, but just a cherry-wood. I can hear the voices of them now, in the smoke."

"Thank ye, mother, for leave given, too ! But I'd bring ye back the little lass, safe and sound. Afore the end o' January would be the time."

"'Tis nothing to speak of. But this I do tell 'ee, Mr. Coupland : I shall have a fair miss of the little maid, with her clack."

"Ah—the little lass ! But she'll have the more to tell ye, mother, when she comes again in the spring-time. All set up and hearty, hay ?"

It was then that the dear old thing, with the best of intentions, made a mistake. She must needs refer—bless her !—to the length of time that had passed since ever Jim had seen the sea. Then, concerned at the sound of the blind man's "Ah, mother !" she misinterpreted her mistake, conceiving it to have been in the reference to sight. Poor old lady ! How hurt she was when she found it out !

Jim was equally concerned on her account. He understood what her thought had been almost before she had begun to explain. "Oh no, no, no, mother !" he cried out, filling the little cottage with his big voice. "Never you think it was that ! Where should we be if I couldn't bide to hear a word about my own bad luck ? It don't make it neither more nor less, ye know ! And it might just as easy have been anybody else." Jim's meaning was that the sum of human misery had been arranged, and this tribulation had to be borne by some one, to balance. If *he* had it, some one else escaped. "No, no," he continued ; "that's not to be thought on, mother !"

But there had been a something, very distinct ; and it was equally clear that Mrs. Fox would like to know what, without asking intrusively. Besides, Jim wanted to make that wrong guess a thing of the past. He would try to explain why he was so moved. "It's none so easy, mother, now and again, to say just what you have an inklin' to say. Not if the other party's to understand, mind you ! But . . . did ye never see the sea, mother ?" No—Mrs. Fox had never seen the sea. But she had been in Worcestershire, to her uncle's, many was the time. Jim declined Worcestershire, but gently, not to seem scornful. "It might be a far-off sight," he said. "Not like seafaring folk see it, from sun-up to sun-up ; just a fair offing all round ye, and the sky overhead." However, Worcestershire had only been referred to that the old lady might not seem quite untravelled. So Jim returned to his explanation.



"It was just a queer feel I had," said he, "about the sound of it again, after such a many years."

Mrs. Fox's slip of the tongue had given her a fright, and she sat silent. A log tumbled on the great open hearth, and a shower of sparks went up the chimney to whirl away in the wind that was roaring down it about the cold white drift of the winter night. Jim sat and thought of his watches out upon the sea, and the same wind whistling through the shrouds, and his strong arm and keen eyesight in the days gone by. All gone—for ever! Nights by the galley-fire, or in some warm corner of a steamer's 'tween-decks, welcome in the spells of look-out duty, when the look-out was for icebergs in the Atlantic—the sort that wait till a ship is well alongside, and choose a clever moment to turn turtle and catch her in the nick. Nights in sailing traders—there are some left still—on a still sea in the tropics, with not a breath of wind below, and strange activity of meteors in an unresponsive universe of stars above. Nights of battle with the storm-fiend—of whirling spray-drench and decks swept by the torrent of the crested seas, all vanished in the past, with that little wicked reason in between that lay in ambush for Jim's eyes on the quay at Cape Town, in the bunghole of an oil-cask.

And then the broken sailor said to his heart: "Can we bear it, you and I?—we that have borne so much; we that must live perforce in dread of so much more still left to bear; we that may even have to say good-bye to the little voice that has been the stronger half of our strength till now? But this—oh, this!—to stand again in hearing of the sea; to know it as of old by the endless intermittent rush of the shoaling beach in its caress, by the music of the curling ridge of its wavelets, nearer, nearer to the shore; to breathe the scent of it in the landward wind—and then! . . . What then? Just to go mad in an aching void of darkness, and cry out in agony for but one glimmer of the daylight that has been once and shall never be again, just one momentary image of the living world that void can never know."

Presently Mrs. Fox rose, saying quietly, "It's the remindin' brings it back," and busied herself to get some toddy for her tenant. She condemned a lemon-scrap as

too dry ; her stimulated pity for poor Jim suggested a new one from " the shop," and she disappeared to get it. Jim sat on in the glimmering firelight he did not know from sunshine, thinking of the sea. He did not put his consolatory pipe down ; it was something, if not much, against thoughts that ran close on the lines the story guessed for them, if not word for word. But it could not stop the tears that *would* come from the eyes that were good now for nothing else but to shed them.

## CHAPTER XLII

A LITTLE bare foot came stealing down the twisted oak stair at the far end of the room, which leads straight up to Lizarann's eyrie where Jarge got the sunflower through the window for her not three months ago. The little white figure in a nightgown is taller than the Lizarann whom we saw, also in her nightgown, rushing out into the snow last winter to summon the police to Uncle Bob. But the robust look of childhood has given place to what is at least an entire unfitness to be out of bed in the cold. If Mrs. Fox had not been lemon-hunting in the shop, she would have sent the delinquent back in double-quick time. Jim's sharp ears caught the patter of the shoeless feet.

"That's the lassie, I lay," said he. And Lizarann, who didn't care, was on his knee before he had got a proper reproach ready. All he could say was, "A little lass out of her bed in the middle of the night! Where's the police, hay?" He affected inability to deal with the case in the absence of the civil authority.

"I come down because it wasn't cold," said Lizarann. "I come down because the stackace is mide of wood. I come down for to kiss my daddy very often." She did so.

Jim called to Mrs. Fox, without. "Mother! Ahoy! Here's a young charackter come out of her bed in the cold."

Mrs. Fox testified to her horror and surprise, saying substantially that, even in the most depraved circles she had mixed with, such a thing as a little girl coming out of bed in the middle of the night was quite outside her experience. Jim suggested that a blanket would be useful as protection, inside which Lizarann could watch him through his toddy, after assisting in its preparation. Mrs. Fox went for the blanket.

"'Tin't cold," said Lizarann. "And there hin't any

cold wind outside in the road. Only in the chimbley. . . . I'm thicker than I was, Daddy." This last was in response to Jim's explorations about her small limbs in search of flesh. Dr. Sidrophel had been a little hopeful about the possible effect of the *ones* and *ites*, if persevered in.

"Where's the flesh you was going to put on, the doctor said? Hey, lassie? Sure you haven't put it on some other little lass?"

Lizarann seemed very uncertain—perhaps didn't understand the question. "Old Mrs. Willoughby, lives near the Spout-Office," she says, "medgers eighteen inches round, and her son Gabriel does the horse-shoes." This is not irrelevance; its object is to show that fat is not always an advantage. Jim misunderstands its drift, and conceives that Mrs. Willoughby is brought forward as an example of slimness and its robust consequences.

"That's no great shakes, anyhow," says he; "for round an old lady's waist. . . ."

But Lizarann interrupts. "I didn't sye wyste," she says. "Round her arms with string above the elber. She hin't got a wyste. She's all one piece. Yass!" Then Mrs. Fox returns, and throws a light on old Mrs. Willoughby. She is her cousin Catharine, and is dropsical. What set the child off on her, she asks?

Jim explains. "The lassie wasn't so far out, mother," he says. "You may have too much of a good thing. Only. . . ." But he doesn't finish.

And Mrs. Fox, when she afterwards told Athelstan Taylor things about Jim, recalled how, at this interview, she could see him always feeling, feeling gently, about the little feet and hands that came out of the blanket she had wrapped about the child. "I did all I could to give him heart," she said then. "But I couldn't say too much about looks, because he could see with his finger-tips, as you might say."

In fact, old Mrs. Fox could offer very little in the way of reassurance, and had to fall back upon a resource that had already been freely drawn upon—the growth of little girls, and the attenuation that was alleged to accompany it, though really an appeal was being made to conditions of development that belong to growing children over

eight years old. Probably Jim saw through all this. But he did not want to discourage those who wished to give him hope. What though it were to be hope against hope—by which one means hope against fear, with despair in the bush—was not their goodwill as good, whatever foes were in league against him?

But, except it were just this once, Jim never allowed his fears to leak out. He could lock them up in his own bosom, and endure life to the end. If he lost his little lass, why!—that was the end of things. He looked forward to it, if it was to be, as a believer in the possibility of his own extinction may look forward to the guillotine. Only, the knife-edge of this guillotine of Jim's was to touch his neck and spring back, then do the same again, then just draw blood and spare him—a guillotine-cat at play with a human heart. But as for showing his fears to the little lass—no more of that!

This was in January. The child was then still enjoying life, with the drawback of that nasty cough. It was only a few weeks since she had been up in the early morning to see her Daddy to his field of operations. Why was that stopped, and why was Lizarann so ready to surrender, and even to remain in bed till the day got warm and she could go out? It was all put down to the winter days. But who ever gave a thought to the winter days in Tallack Street? She firmly believed in her heart that, if only the medicine-bottles were flung on a dust-heap, and she and Daddy were to go back to their old lives, she would still be able to wait his coming in the cold, and perhaps tell all about the Flying Dutchman again to old Mother Groves, and hear more of the strange experiences of the Turk. She identified her old health with her surroundings at that time, and credited *them* with claims for gratitude really due to *it*.

However, the exhilarating bygone time had disappeared. Perhaps it was the healthy, bracing influence of Aunt Stingy that she missed, and the occasional stimulus, when Jim was afar, of a strap or a slipper? Perhaps it was Uncle Bob? Perhaps it was The Boys? If she and Bridgetticks were shouting defiance to them—now this moment, through the snow—would it make her cough?

She scouted the idea. It never used to it. Indeed, she did not feel sure that Bridgetticks might not prove, if fairly tried, worth quarts of Chloric Ether. A dream hung about her waking consciousness of Bridgetticks and the Turk, mysteriously visitors to relatives in the neighbourhood of Royd, and of a wild escapade to the highest ridge of a hill in the neighbourhood, in the snow. At the end of that dream an imaginary self passed through the mind of the little pale dreamer, a robust young self and a rosy, that broke in upon an image of Daddy at his hour for leaving the well-head, with, "Me and this boy and Bridgetticks, we been right up atop of Crumwen, and I haven't copped not wuntst, the whole time!" A little of that sort of thing would set her up. But she wasn't going to say so. She loved the big Rector and Phoebe and Jones, and Mrs. Forks, and even poor Dr. Spiderophel, with his scientific delusions, far too much to hint that they could be mistaken. They should have it all their own way, they should!

Athelstan Taylor became quite hopeful about the little girl during that January and February. He paid Lizarann a visit at intervals—very short ones when her absences from school were frequent. According to the reports he carried to Miss Caldecott and his own little girls, the patient took a decided turn for the better so often that a very few weeks should have sufficed to qualify her to practise as an Amazon. Phoebe and Joan were quite satisfied that when papa and aunty took them up to town in autumn Lizarann would come too, and then they would all go to see Madame Tussaud's, Westminster Abbey, and Tallack Street. Especially the 'ast. But this expedition never came off.

When Teacher from London came again about Easter time she was disappointed. She did not find what she had been led to suppose she would; not by any conscious exaggeration of the Rector's, but by his genuine over-hopefulness, backed by groundless mis-statements of fact from the little woman herself contained in very well-written letters enclosing hieroglyphs that meant kisses. Adeline Fossett took the first opportunity of finding out whether the patient was still a self-acting Turkish Bath in

the small hours, or dry. Her observations were not satisfactory. But there!—you know all about cases of this sort; at least, we expect you do, though we hope you don't.

"I wish we could get her to the seaside," said she. "Any of those places would do. You know, Yorick, you are just as anxious to save the little person as I am. Every bit!"

"My dear Addie!—of course I am. The idea! But we mustn't talk of *saving* her, yet. I should say *losing* her, perhaps; but you know what I mean. We can talk to Sidrophel—see what he says."

So the doctor was referred to, and his opinion amounted to this: that if the child went away by herself to any sort of hospital or home, she would either have to be indoors with the other patients, or exposed to all the windy gusts of spring on the sea-beach, or perhaps in a shelter with a fine sea-view. People were always hunting climates that didn't exist, and inflicting horrible hardships on themselves in the chase. When summer by the sea was a certainty, send her, by all means. After midsummer, he should say; no sooner!

This was in early April, just when a misleading rush of crocuses into a treacherous few days of sunshine had set folk off hoping for a real spring this year; like when we were young—like Chaucer—like Spenser. Some mistaken nightingales arrived, and must have felt foolish. Infatuated orchards promised themselves a crop of pears; it even went as far as that!

"We may be thankful for one thing, at any rate," said the Rev. Athelstan to Miss Fossett two or three weeks after. "We did not pack off that little wench to the seaside. In weather like this she's best where she is, on the whole. Sidrophel's right. He often is."

"He was right this time. Just look at it!" Sleet was the thing referred to.

"Werry bad state the roads are in, sir," says a third party in this conversation. "Bad alike for 'orse and man. Thankee, sir!" He was a cabman, and he had just driven this lady and gentleman over five miles, so he knew. He departs with the postscript sixpence his last words procured, as an extra concession after an over-liberal fare,

and his late tenants pass in at the door of the little house that is part of the school-building where Lizarann developed that first inflammatory cold months ago. The story is back for the moment on the Cazenove Estate, and the Rector is going presently to walk over to the new incumbent at St. Vulgate's, who will house him to-night, and tell of his few sheep and many goats. He can stay for a cup of tea now, and get there by seven.

"Yes, the doctor was right. She's just as well off under Mrs. Fox's thatch. Better! When the warm weather comes we'll send her for six weeks to Chalk Cliff, and give her a good set-up!" But his hearer only sees her way to silence on this point.

The story has told, but very slightly, the strange *rapprochement* between these two, that had lasted through so many years. For over twenty they had elected to pose as brother and sister. During all that time the mind of each had referred to the other as in some sense the principal person; that is the only way to express their thought. When Athelstan first adored the fascinating Sophia Caldecott, he really could hardly have said which he wanted most, that young person herself, or Gus's sister's sympathy about her. But so blind was he at the time, so blind had he remained through all the years of his married life, that he never conceived that, midmost among all her memories of the past, a lurid star outshining all the others, was the record of that hour when the young man she thought and spoke of as a boy, remembered so well, came to her father's house intoxicated with a new-found joy, to tell her chiefly and above all others that he was affianced to—well!—to the wrong sister; not the friend she had set her heart on!

As they sat there by the fire in the half-dark, resting after their journey, his mind, like hers, went off on old times. Presently he shook off his own burden of memories with, "Well!—I suppose I ought to be on the move."

"Don't hurry away. It's not much past five yet, and they can make dinner half-past seven. You've plenty of time."

The flicker of the fire has the best of what is left of the light of a dull day; it shows two faces serious enough, certainly, but not sad. They are dwelling on the same past, each from its own point of view; but their owners are



really happy to eke out a little more time in the half-light, each knowing the heart of the other. They are glad dinner at St. Vulgate's can be half-past seven; it is half-an-hour longer to be together, and really those people in the train had made it impossible to talk.

"I shan't see you again for ever so long, Yorick, unless you and Bessy change your minds and come up earlier."

"You must manage a visit to Royd in July."

"If I can!—it depends. But..."

The Rector glanced shrewdly up. "But anything particular?" said he.

"Well, Yorick, yes! Something particular. Only I don't know how to say it." As she sits there, a little flushed—or is it only the firelight?—one hand a face-rest, the other coaxing the burning coals into groups with a persuasive poker, the question that suggests itself is that old one—how comes she to be an old maid? A six-and-thirty maid, at any rate!

"I know what it's about, Addie. It's the Bill, and the Bishop."

"Yes, dear old boy." This was a great relief. "Now, do tell me, what shall you do?"

"You mean if the Bill passes?"

"Yes."

"I shall do nothing. Why should I?"

"Not even if Dr. Barham...?"

"Dr. Barham can *do* nothing. He can only remonstrate. What was it he said to Lady Arkroyd?"

"That if the Bill passed it would be his duty to point out to you that your relations... well!—your relation with Bessy had altogether changed since the Act; and that for a clerk in holy orders to keep house with any single lady not his sister by parentage would be... well!—would not do at all."

"And what did Lady Arkroyd say to the Bishop?"

"Not herself; it was the Duchess. Only she told me. What the Duchess said was, 'I hope if you do, the Reverend Athelstan will bring a suit against you for libel, and make you smart for it.' Dr. Barham won't speak to her Grace now."

"Dr. Barham would be quite within his rights. No

action for libel could possibly lie. Any remonstrance on a matter of morality within his diocese must be a Bishop's privilege. Besides, a written letter would hardly constitute publication...."

"Dear old Yorick! I wonder why men are so fond of talking law to women, as if they knew by nature and women didn't. Never mind the law! It isn't that.... Don't you see how disagreeable it would be for Bessy?"

"No—I don't know that I do. I don't see why Bess need bother herself about it...."

"Hm...!"

"Oh—well—yes! Yes, I do—of course I do! It would be detestable for Bess."

"You see I'm right?"

"Oh yes, absolutely. It was only my perversity." A self-excusing, deprecatory shoulder-shrug. *Peccavit confitetur* is its import. Then he breaks into a good-humoured laugh. "After all, you know, there's always a way out of the difficulty."

Something brings a sudden exclamation from Adeline Fossett. "Yes, what?—but go on!" She has risen from her seat, and stands with her hands pressed close together, and eyes of expectation fixed on his. "Oh, Yorick!—is it—is it... Oh, I do hope... is it the one I've thought of?" She hesitates. He hesitates.

"That depends on *what* you have thought," he says at last. But with a suspicion that they may have thought alike, too.

"Oh, if I dared guess!... I don't know; dare I?... yes, I will—I don't care!..."

"Go on!"

"If the Bill passes, you know... then... then... you and Bessy to get married! Was that your idea, Yorick? Oh, do tell me!"

"Why, of course it was."

Miss Fossett throws herself back in her chair again, with a deep sigh as of relief. "Oh dear, how nice that would be!" she says. But she is taking it all to heart, and her eyes are full of tears. The Rector is very cool over it.

"It would be a way out of the difficulty," he says.

"Not a bad one, perhaps. Better, at any rate, than Bess having to turn out and leave the children. They are quite like her own, you see. And it wouldn't make any difference." This is not quite understood, apparently, and he adds: "Everything would go on exactly as usual."

Miss Fossett had a sort of feeling that it might be possible to parade an unlover-like attitude too far. Athelstan surely might warm up a little. He had spoken as he might have done if marriage were a new hat. It would, or wouldn't, fit. "You would . . . like it, though—wouldn't you?" she asked, in a rather frightened sort of way.

"It would suit me very well. I shouldn't like the only other expedient—marrying somebody else to make up a possible housekeeping. We both should know exactly why we had done it, and we should gain the end proposed. It would rather be for Bess to decide if she would like such a very prosaic arrangement."

"You mean chilly?"

"No, I don't. We're not chilly now, Bess and I. And we never quarrel. The temperature wouldn't go down because we had deferred to the opinion of our diocesan." He drew out his watch. "I must go. . . . Don't think I'm not in earnest, Addie. If the Bill passes, I might have to ask Bess to settle the point. I should do it for the sake of the children. The worst of it would be that if she negatived the idea, we might be uncomfortable afterwards. As for her leaving the children, of course that's out of the question. And I couldn't have her carry them off, like poor Challis's wife. . . . I *must* go." He got up to depart.

"I'm disappointed, Yorick," said Adeline.

"What at, Addie?"

"Why, of course she wouldn't have you on those terms."

"Just consider! If you were in her place?"

"Well—I *wouldn't*! Not on *those* terms." She seemed to mean every syllable.

The Rector stood in the passage, buttoning his overcoat. "Poor Challis!" said he, going back on the conversation. "They've made a knight of him! I shall go and look for him before I go back. I fancy he's back in town."

"You know I don't agree, Yorick?"

"What about?"

"About 'poor Challis.'" These words were said in inverted commas. "I told you, don't you remember, that I had heard all about it from the other side—from Charlotte Eldridge."

"Yes, but you were biassed against him, because of his deceased wife's sister marriage. You know you were!"

"Well!—wasn't I right?" But there is an amused twinkle in the Rector's eye, which is understood. "Oh no, Yorick, no!—it's *quite* a different thing. . . ."

"Before and after an Act of Parliament, is that it?"

But Adeline has run her ship on the sands, and must back off. "It's impossible to compare the two cases," she says.

"Do you know, if you are to be at St. Vulgate's by seven-thirty, you'll want a cab. You can't carry what you're pleased to call your little valise, and get there by then. Do take a cab, Yorick!"

"Fifty-five minutes does it," says Yorick. "And I've got fifty-seven. I've a great mind to spend the odd two reading you a little homily about consistency. . . ."

"Go away. Good-bye." A cordial shake of the hand is all that forms permit, and it seems such a shame!

One reason why it was impossible to compare the two cases was a perfectly clear one, to the thinking of Miss Fossett's innermost heart. But she kept it tight locked up there.

In the old days, when all her forecasts of life took her own practical exclusion from it for granted, and wrote celibacy large on every page of her record-volume, her great dream had been to unite her beloved friend Bessy Caldecott to that dearest of all possible young fellows, her brother Gus's friend Athelstan. Adeline was a little prone to playing at Providence, and—don't you see?—Bessy was so good and sound, and so much better altogether than that showy little sister of hers. So, what wonder, when Athelstan led the family minx, Sophy, to the altar, that Adeline rather than otherwise wished that the earth would open and swallow the altar? She would have resented the idea that any personal feeling entered into the matter.

Even so in these new days, with all this change, she could and did believe that she could see her old girl friend the wife of her old boy friend, without any feeling but sheer rejoicing that Yorick had married the right sister after all. And this feeling entered strangely into her real views on the Deceased Wife's Sister question. Catechized closely, she might have confessed to a belief in real wives, with a sub-creed that marriage with a sister of one was somehow a worse desecration of a sacrament than marriage with a second cousin, for instance, or a mere female undefined. There was no evidence to show that Challis hadn't married the right sister first. If he hadn't, of course the "living in Sin" business had come off in the first act of his drama, and nothing was needed but an Act of Parliament to qualify the parties to live in purity, ungrundied.

At any rate, those were the lines on which Miss Fossett would have justified her friend's defiance of his Bishop. And when Yorick had referred to that other way of solving his problem—marriage with the female undefined—she had shut any hint of that female being defined as herself into the very core of her heart with a snap.

## CHAPTER XLIII

"HAVE him down here if you like, Athel," said Miss Caldecott to her brother-in-law on the first of August, a little over three months later. "I shall be in London with Phoebe and Joan. So it can't matter to me. Only I think he ought to be on honour."

"How do you mean, aunty?"

"You know what I mean. On honour not to."

"Not to what?" But Aunt Bessy wasn't going to answer questions on the subject, whatever it was. So she closed her eyes in harmony with an expressive lip-pinch, and said *finis* dumbly to this chapter of the conversation. However, she began another.

"Apart from that, I don't like his tone," said she.

"I know you don't." This meant that the Rector didn't want the second chapter. He harked back to the first. "Perhaps Sir Challis will promise not to," said he.

"I don't see how you can ask him." This was said very dryly, and the speaker indicated that it was an ultimatum by going on with a letter she was writing.

For Miss Caldecott was a sort of inverse Charlotte Eldridge. To the latter lady, as we know, the mention of a lady and gentleman, as such, and such only, was as the sound of battle to the war-horse. The former was very apt to petrify if the conversation went outside the limits of the neuter gender without stipulating for a strict neutrality on the part of the other two. A hint of what Mrs. Protheroe called "going on" on the part of properly—or improperly—qualified masculines and feminines was enough to make Aunt Bessy discover that we must be getting back, and begin looking for those children's gloves.

Why Adeline Fossett had yearned to link the lives of this lady and her friend Yorick was very difficult to guess.

That, however, does not belong to the story at present. Its business is with the lady and gentleman responsible for the little bit of frigidity it has just recorded.

When Athelstan Taylor called at the Hermitage in April, just after Challis's arrival in England, he threw out, in thoughtless hospitality, a suggestion that the latter should pay him a visit in the Autumn. The invitation was jumped at, and the Rector perceived afterwards that there might have been a reason for this, to the possibility of which he was at the moment not sufficiently awake. But he was too honourable to go back on his word.

If he had felt sure enough of his ground he might have spoken frankly to Challis, and put him off till some time when Judith's absence from the Hall was a certainty. But he had not enough to go upon for that. He found out the poverty of his case by attempting a letter to Challis. "My dear Challis—You know me, and I know you will excuse my speaking plainly. . . ." And then had to think what the plain speech was to be. He considered "I know that you and Miss Arkroyd are quite within your rights when, etc.," and "I think your wife's strange conduct has left you free to take advantage of what I should otherwise regard as a legal shuffle, etc."; and "I know you would not avail yourself of my hospitality to, etc."; and even "I can't have you making love to Judith Arkroyd while you are staying at the Rectory, etc."; but concluded by rejecting them all—he liked the last best—and tearing his letter to fragments.

He ended by saying to himself: "These are not young people, to be *chaperon'd* and guarded. If they are in earnest, they will not be kept apart by *not* having Challis at my house. And the more I see of Challis the better my chance of influencing him towards the wiser course." A little sub-commune with his soul as to whether he was quite sure he was not being influenced by his relations with the county-families and the Bishop confirmed him, and Challis came down to Royd Rectory in August. Thus it had come about that the Rector and his guest, one day before the middle of that month, were walking about in the garden early—breakfast is very early at the Rectory when its master is by himself there—using up

their subjects of conversation; or, rather, perhaps we should say, chat.

You know what a fool one always is about that, when one goes to stay with a friend; how one gets gruelled for lack of matter, and the old subjects have to do a second time, and more. Challis had come down from London by a late train the night before—too late to indulge in arrears of common topics then and there. That slaughter of the innocents had been postponed till next day.

"How's our poor friend blind Samson and his small daughter?" The recollection of Lizarann—more than a twelvemonth past, mind you!—twinkles in the speaker's face as he blows a cloud from his invariable cigar.

"Lizarann's getting on capitally, according to the latest accounts. Samson's become a public character, and is making himself useful as a sort of human pump. Do you want a large bucket of water?"

"Not at this moment. But I may some time. Why?"

"When you do, Samson will wind you one up from under the chalk, as fine a bucket of water as you'll find in the country. It isn't good for gout, certainly. But otherwise it's perfect. Not the ghost of a microbe!"

"Perhaps the microbes were gouty, and died of it. An image of a well presents itself to me, with Samson everlastingly raising water, and villagers bearing it away in pails."

"You've got it exactly. We'll pay Samson a visit."

"Of course we will. I like the idea of Samson at the well-head. . . . But, I say, Reverend Sir! . . ."

"What's the question?"

"How about the little wench? Samson's little wench."

"I told you. She's getting on capitally. . . ."

"That's just what I mean. What business has a little wench to be getting on capitally? Has she been ill?"

"I should hardly put it that way. No—I think I may say she hasn't exactly. But this chest-delicacy made the womankind and the doctor a little uneasy. On the whole we thought it best to send her down to Chalk Cliff to get a good dose of sea air. It appears to be setting her up."

Challis glanced shrewdly at the Rector's face of dis-



comfort. "Sea air's the thing," he said. "Does wonders!" And both felt very contented with the effect of imaginary sea air on imaginary human lungs.

That remark we made, a page ago, about the way one uses up one's material for talk so heedlessly, was made with a reservation. It should only be applied to *causeries*, not to serious debate of deep interest. There are two distinct strata of conversation with all people; the things that interest us generally are the top stratum; those that touch us are the second. Go a little deeper, and you will reach those that put us on the rack. Only, when it comes to that, is it conversation any longer? What is it?

These two men had plenty to talk about in the top stratum—enough to fill the day out had they chosen. But the Rector had no intention of leaving the second untouched, and no fear of digging down to the third, if need were. There was, however, no need for either yet awhile. Both might remain in abeyance, under a silent pact, as long, at least, as the sun shone. Serious talk-time comes with lamps and candles. Once in the day Challis was conscious of the thinness of the crust of the second stratum. On their way to visit Jim's well-head he asked his companion whereabouts it was. "Half-way between the village and the Hall," was the reply—"perhaps rather nearer the Hall than the village. Oh yes—certainly nearer!" Challis asked—to make talk, for he knew the answer to his question—whether the family were there now. "Miss Arkroyd isn't," said the Rector.

"I have never seen blind Samson, you know," said Challis. "Only the little cuss." The recollection of Lizarann brought a twinkle to his face. To his companion's, none. Who, however, says gravely: "She was a dear, amusing little thing."

Blind Samson is on duty. The blaze of a sun, low enough to make long shadows, shows the wreck of a man, his face bronzed now by its glare through a hot summer and the congenial effort of the well-handle. A little way off you would not know the eyes saw nothing, but for their never flinching from the sunlight that strikes full upon them. Going nearer you would know them for dead. So

too, if his legs were hidden as he leans on the bearing-post, puffing placidly at his pipe, you would judge him a fine sample and a strong, well cast indeed for the part of Samson.

"Jim's a popular chap 'n these parts," says the Rector as they draw near. "Our barber in the village tells me he always looks forward to Mr. Coupland's weekly visit. Every Saturday Jim goes to him—in spite of a fiction he indulges in that he can shave himself—to be ready for church on Sunday."

"I thought you said the other day—I mean last April—that he was a worse heathen than myself?"

"So he is. But he has made a compromise with his Maker—whom he disapproves of strongly otherwise—on the score of music. He is a tremendous addition to the village choir. I fancy he was always musical, but his blindness has developed the faculty."

"Well—it must be water in the desert for poor Jim. Here we are, I suppose?"

A dog came down the path of worn bricks, set on edge, that leads to the well. He is Jim's dog, and very important, for he conducts Jim to the well and back daily, in Lizarann's absence. But the actual importance of this dog, though great, is as nothing compared to his conviction of it. This, if it does not amount to a belief that he turns the well-handle, lays claim to reserved powers of veto over, or permission conceded to, Jim's interference with the water-supply. He smells every applicant for water carefully, to see that all is right, and he glances into every bucket before it leaves the well-head, and occasionally tastes the contents, as though in search of microbes. In his opinion it is entirely owing to him that the well has not been poisoned by bicyclists, who are afraid to stop and effect their wicked purposes because of the promptitude with which he runs out and barks at them. He appears to sanction Challis and the Rector, and to explain them, obligingly, to his principal—or perhaps we should say employee.

"I caught the sound of ye, coming down the road, master," says Jim. "You're a glad hearing to a man, a marning like this. A sight for sore eyes, as the saying

is." Which was said with such a serene, unconscious confidence that it almost imposed on his hearers. Jim didn't let the Rector's hand go at once. "Nothing further, I lay?" said he anxiously.

"Not since yesterday, Jim. I thought the letter a good one. I've brought it back in my pocket. . . . We're talking about his little girl, Challis, down at Chalk Cliff. . . . This is Sir Alfred Challis, Jim, a friend of Lizarann's."

Jim seemed puzzled for a few seconds, perhaps not recalling the name in its present form; then experienced illumination. "Ay, sure, sir! . . . I lost my bearings for the moment. . . . The little lassie, she's talked of you many's the time. But that'll be a while back?"

"Over a twelvemonth, Jim," says Challis, and his inner soul adds, "And what a twelvemonth!" But he has to talk about the child. "I'm sorry she's not here, Jim," he says, and means it. "We made great friends, your little lassie and I did. She said she liked me better than she did her aunt."

Jim laughed delightedly. "There never was love lost between the lass and her Aunt Priscilla. They weren't cut out for berthmates." Nevertheless, he didn't want to leave his sister quite out in the cold. "Priscilla's a good-hearted woman, ye know, too, when all's told. But she's had some bad times . . . a bad husband. . . ." He hesitated on his condemnation, and went for palliation instead. "Well!—perhaps that's too hard a word. Poor Bob Steptoe!—he'd have made a better end but for his drawback. He took a good rating as a cobbler." Jim paused, perplexed by some reminiscence. "I don't hear much nowadays of my sister Priscilla; not since I come down here. I make out she's in sarvice with a lady at Wimbledon." The fact is, Jim and Aunt Stingy were drifting apart by tacit consent.

Challis ought to have been able to contrive a reminder that Aunt Stingy was his cook. He began by saying: "Of course—with my wife. She's our cook at the Hermitage." That wouldn't do, clearly. Try again! "She's our cook at home." He wasn't at all sure this wasn't worse. He decided on, "She cooks for me, you know, when I'm in London," but threw up entrenchments against possible

surprises by changing the subject. "So your little maid's gone to the seaside?"

Jim forgot Aunt Stingy with avidity. "Ah! for sure she has!" said he. "My little lass! But she's coming back early next month. Ask the master!"

"Early next month, Jim. That's the fixture." Is there a trace of cheerful reassurance in the Rector's voice? Yes—just enough to produce misgiving in Jim. It has to be stifled in its birth. Jim treads bravely over the cinder-traps—the fires smouldering underground. "Ye see, gentlemen," he says, "it's this way: If my lassie comes back afore September, there'll maybe be a spell of sunshiny weather fit for a lassie to see her Daddy a mile down the road. Belike, too, stop a little to bear him company, in the best o' the day. Many a September month have I known, early morning apart, to compare with the rarest days of the summer."

"They call it a summer, you know, Jim. St. Augustin's summer." So says Challis; and he is ready to supply any climatic record to please Jim. "Sometimes the thermometer has been known to stand at ninety in the shade."

Jim is greatly impressed, and very happy over this. He sees before him, in imagination, a fortnight or three weeks of matchless weather, with Lizarann beside him. His soul laughs; indeed, his lungs join chorus. "What did the doctor say again, master?" says he.

But Athelstan's face is one of concern. The doctor's report had been, alas! that the effect of the sea air would very likely begin to tell on the patient when she got back. She would, no doubt, be better when she got back to her father, about whom she was fidgety. This doctor kindly vouched for the same thing having happened several times in like cases.

Challis watched his friend as he made out the best tale he could. Do you remember Challis's first appearance in this story, and how we spoke of him as perceptive? He was that, and all sorts of little intimations constantly reached him, by mysterious telegraphies, of concurrent events—things many would miss altogether. No wonder he read between the lines of Athelstan Taylor's version of the doctor's report! No wonder!—for any but a blind

man would have detected in the Rector's serious face how little he believed the well-worn forms of speech folk use to keep the hearts of others alive, in case—just this one time—a real change for the better should come, or the last new remedy should fulfil the promises of the ream of testimonials it was wrapped in when we bought it. But the Rector threw as much hope as he dared into his telling, and did well, on the whole. And Jim was satisfied for now.

A little later, when the two were starting to go back to the Rectory by a roundabout way, having left Jim attending to the demands for water of an influx of applicants, Athelstan Taylor said to Challis: "I felt quite ashamed of myself just now. . . . What for? Why, for talking all that stuff to Jim about poor little Lizarann! But what can one do? There's nothing to be gained by plunging the poor fellow in despair, as long as any hope remains of her outgrowing it."

"You mean there is some hope, then?"

"Some." That was all the Rector said.

"I see. But is it to be a long job?"

"Probably not—probably not. But she may live for some little time yet—with care. I don't know how much Jim knows or suspects."

"Where is she now actually?"

"It's called the Browne Convalescent Home, at Chalk Cliff, in Kent. Sidrophel—I should say Pordage—said he saw no object in sending her to a mild lowering place at this time of year. What she wanted was the sea-air, and he is very much in love with Chalk Cliff. Well!—one smells the seaweed there."

"It's the iodine, I suppose." Challis's mind travelled to his own children, who were, he hoped, soaking in the iodine, wallowing in the sand, wading in the shallows, and not keeping their things out of the water. Should he ever see Mumps and Chobbles again? Possibly. Suppose he were to meet them years hence, lengthened and completed, at Girton, perhaps—even engaged; who can tell?—would they know him again? His thoughts rushed swiftly, *more suo*, to the construction of all sorts and conditions of social horrors, beginning with an improbable evening party with Chobbles in the foreground, and her married sister,

and a fiendish necessity for explaining to a dazzling lady who was charmed with both of them, that they were his children by his former marriage—the very identical Mumps and Chobbles he had so often told her about ! But that dream was soon sent packing, although the dazzling lady said, with a pleasant, graceful contempt for all co-relatives of Grundy : “ You *must* come and see me, you two dear girls ! Do let’s be German, and take no notice of things. Never mind the *orkwidities*, as my husband calls them.” A worse phantasm followed. Two girls in mourning beside a grave, and “ Marianne, daughter of James and Sarah Craik,” on the head-stone. So vivid was the impression that the words were on his lips : “ Mumps and Chobbles, don’t you know me ?” He shook it off, denouncing its intrinsic absurdity, even while he admitted he had no justification for doing so. Marianne would die, and so would he, and neither would be beside the other when the hour came.

“ Am I going too quick for you ?” said the Rector. He had broken into his tremendous stride, as he was always apt to do when not checked. Challis admitted his limitations, and suggested that they might go easily up this hill. As this hill was a short-cut across a curve of the road, and the path over it was zigzagged, and landslipped, and fern-grown, besides seeming to consist almost entirely of rabbit-holes, it was not a hill to go up easily, in any literal sense. But Challis had only intended to suggest moderation. He gave his whole soul to avoiding burrows, and reached solid ground alive. As he approached the top, alongside of his companion, he was aware of a huge dog, blue-black against the sky, on the ridge in front of them. Saladin appeared to be waiting for them, and to have time on his hands. Whistled to, he condescended to trot towards them, the sooner to meet. Interrogated as to his reasons for being there by himself, he kept silence, but smelt his questioners.

Perhaps he wasn’t by himself. Surmise inclined to the supposition that the carriage was in the neighbourhood ; probably Lady Arkroyd, driving back from Thanet, said the Rector. But attentive listening established carriage-wheels on the road from Furnival—the opposite direction.

"It's Miss Arkroyd coming from the station. She was coming by the two-forty from Euston." So spoke Challis.

The Rector looked full at him. "How did you know?" said he. He seemed a good deal surprised.

"Because she told me," said Challis. He in his turn seemed surprised at the surprise of the other, and interrogation remained on the face of both. Saladin seemed able to wait.

After a moment the Rector said suddenly: "Because she's been away at her sister's—Brayle Court, you know—the Felixthorpes'."

"Yes; why not? She told me three weeks ago she was coming to-day. She drove to Bletchley from Brayle."

Athelstan Taylor's face was a funny mixture of perplexity and mild reproach, not without confidence in his companion. "But why didn't you say so?" said he.

"You mean when you mentioned her just now—just before we came to Jim? Well!—because I didn't want to spoil our walk. . . . There's the carriage!"

The carriage was there, in the road some distance below, and was whistling for Saladin. He appeared to accept the whistle as a courtesy on its part, intended to keep him *au fait* of its movements and whereabouts. Otherwise he had a short time at his disposal, and would pass it in giving sanction and encouragement to his present companions. The horses' hoofs and the whistle passed and grew less in the distance, but Saladin remained undisturbed and statuesque.

"No," said Challis; "I didn't want to spoil our walk. Indeed, I'm in two minds if I shouldn't do better to say nothing at all about it."

"About what?"

"Well!—that's just the point. However, as I've leaked out this much, I suppose I may as well tell. About myself and Judith Arkroyd."

"Oh dear!" said the Rector. "I had been supposing—I mean I had been beginning to hope—that was all at an end. . . ."

Saladin had no more time to spare for nonsense of this sort. He went with a rush—the rush of a sudden whirlwind—crashing through mere valueless briar and fern

like gossamer; but suggesting that it was for *their* sakes, not *his*, that he steered clear of timber-trees. The carriage, still audible, became aware of him, and stopped whistling.

"I want to tell you all about it on my own behalf. And I suspect Judith will on hers." So Challis spoke, when the lull came. He then went on to tell all that this story has told, and it may be more. And the narrative lasted all the way back to the Rectory.



## CHAPTER XLIV

THE Rector sat in his usual chair in the library smoking his usual after-dinner pipe, his only concession to tobacco. It served a turn now—harmonized his life with that of his friend, who, of course, sat on the other side of the rug, that both might be conscious of an empty grate. One pays this tribute, in the summer, to the comfort the warmth would have been had it been winter. Or is it a survival of some ancestral fire-worship?

It was Challis's second pipe in the day that he was lighting, but his fourth smoke. He looked as though something narcotic were wanting, if he were to sleep in the night ahead of him. His forehead throbbed, the Rector felt convinced. Else why did that restless, nervous hand skim it over, from side to side, then press the closed eyelids below as though to squeeze a pain out?

He had told the whole of his story, ending it up during dinner, and doing poor justice to the efforts of the Rectory cook. Athelstan Taylor had listened nearly in silence, not saying how much he had already heard, or had guessed, of the way things had gone since his attempted intercession with Mrs. Challis. Challis's absences from England, and the chance that their London visits never coincided, had kept them apart until his visit to London three months since. On that occasion they did little more than arrange that Challis should visit the Rectory "as soon as he could get away." And he couldn't—or at least didn't—"get away" till August. But nothing that he had told his friend had occasioned the latter the least surprise.

"Well!—that's all," said he, as he lighted his pipe.

The Rector's face was all strength and pity as he sat looking at his storm-tossed friend. He remained silent awhile over it. Challis could not hurry him to speech. However, there was the whole evening ahead.

At last he spoke. "That's quite all, is it? Very good. Now, I can't and won't recommend any course to you, because, my dear man, you are under an hallucination, and you wouldn't pay the slightest attention to anything I suggested. But I'll tell you if you like what I shall say to Judith Arkroyd if she comes to me for advice."

"What?"

"I shall say, 'Don't!'"

"Don't go on with it, that is?"

"Exactly. I shan't mince matters. I shall tell the girl flatly that I think she's doing wrong...."

"But why—but why? Surely if *she* is, I am. Or more so! Far more so!"

"Do you suppose I regard you as a responsible agent?"

"I don't think you do. But I am one, for all that. What shall you say to Judith?"

"That I *do* regard her as a responsible agent. I shall entreat her not to consent to such a mad scheme. I shall try to make her see the folly of acting under panic in a matter of such vital importance. I shall tell her plainly, as I told you an hour ago, that I think your wife's action has been justifiable, although it has been violent and exaggerated. I admit that, you know...."

"And I think that it has been violent and exaggerated, but admit that it has not been altogether unjustifiable. Isn't that the difference between us, Rector?"

"Precisely. Well!—I shall say so to Judith. And I shall put it this way to her. 'If before God and your conscience you can disclaim all share in what has come about, if you have never by word or look been guilty of an attempt to make this man's plighted faith to his wife a wavering one, then it may be you may marry him and not live to repent it. But if it is otherwise, you may be sowing by such a marriage the seeds of a remorse that may last you a life-time.'...."

Challis interrupted him. "Judith is absolutely unconscious...." he began.

"Exactly, exactly, exactly!" said the Rector, nodding in a comfortable, we-understand-all-that sort of way.

"But, about this sort of thing, sometimes a young lady's standard of unconsciousness is low. You must excuse me

if I try—it's a toss-up if I succeed—to make her probe her soul to its lowest depths."

"My dear Yorick!—excuse my boning Miss Fossett's name again; but it does suit you so exactly—My dear Yorick, whatever you do or say will be right—*shall* be right. That's the rule of the game. All I say is, don't make Judith imagine herself to have been guilty of a treacherous scheme that never entered her mind. She assures me..." He hesitated.

"Yes!" from the Rector.

"Well!—she assures me that until that unfortunate—or mind you!—it may prove fortunate—failure in self-restraint... suppose we call it!..."

"Call it anything you like, as long as you feel properly ashamed of it."

Challis accepted the rule of the game he had just laid down loyally, and continued, "Until that moment she had not the slightest idea that I had ever entertained..." Again a hesitation.

"Precisely!" said the Rector. Both went as near a laugh as the contexts permitted, and then Challis said, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, "Well!—it's no use talking." But his friend meant to say more. "It may be no use," said he. "But I've picked up—in the pulpit, I suppose—the old vice of the sermon-monger, and I like to have my say out..."

"I didn't mean *you* were to stop," interjected Challis.

"Then I shall go on, as per contract." He appeared to put semi-levities aside with the finished pipe he laid down, and stood facing Challis as he sat. Standing so, he looked so much the build of a soldier that his cloth, so obnoxious to Challis, almost became regimentals. He resumed, very earnestly, "I shall say this, too, to Judith—no!—don't be afraid I shall be cruel to her. Why!—haven't I known her since she was a little tot, and sat on my knee?... I shall tell her that to me marriage is a sacrament just as solemn as any mutual undertaking where each party is in earnest and believes in the earnestness of the other... yes!—even as contracts about darling money—and that no antecedent relation of the couple can flaw the pledge once given... yes!—I am prepared to go

any length; but never mind that now. . . . And I shall tell her this:—that however obstinate and wrongheaded your wife's conduct may have been, just in so far as it has been provoked by any misconduct of yours or hers—just so far are you morally guilty in contemplating any step which will make the position irretrievable."

Challis broke into his momentary pause. "Do you really mean, soberly and seriously, that you think Marianne's dragging the children away—my Chobbles was like your Joan, you know, Yorick!—do you think her catching at a legal pretext to deprive me of them has not given me a free hand? What right has Marianne to condemn me to a loveless and lonely life . . . ?"

"Stop, Challis—stop! Stop on the legal pretext! At what age of the world has man, the strong, scrupled to catch at legal pretexts to secure the betrayal and confusion of woman, the weak? Legal pretexts, mind you, whose iniquity stinks in every legal phrase that relates to her, in every statute that he has framed and she has had no hand in! How many legal pretexts are there in the whole of them that a woman can catch at to her own advantage? One turns up now and again, in a rare conjunction of circumstances, and, hey presto!—we are all on the alert to blame the woman who does it."

"You're quite right," said Challis ruefully. "It's melancholy to think how keenly alive one is to other folks' sinfulness when one suffers by it personally; loses one's Chobbles, for instance. I was fond of the young person, you see, Yorick! Besides, there's Mumps. And even Bob she contrives to stint me of. Either that, or the boy drifts away from his sisters."

"You should have thought of all that when you . . ."

"Made a fool of myself?"

"Quite so. By-the-bye, Challis, have you asked yourself—supposing that you ratify this folly of yours, as I understand you propose to do—what you mean to tell Bob to account for the new order of things?"

"Yes, frequently."

"And have you answered the question?"

"No, I have not."

"Do you see any prospect of answering it?"

"None whatever!"

"Very well, Challis! Now listen. It appears to me that you are going to take a step you are this much ashamed of, that you cannot look your own son in the face about it. And you are doing this confessedly in case the passing of an Act of Parliament should make that step impossible at a future time. You know perfectly well that—Judith apart—you would welcome that Act of Parliament, because it would give you back your children, and at least pave the way to a reconciliation with their mother. . . . Yes, it would! The 'living in Sin' twaddle would die a natural death before an Act of Parliament; your excellent mother-in-law's teeth would be drawn, and your wife would come to her senses as soon as the two little girls were delivered at Wimbledon by a judicial order. Once you two were face to face—just think of it!—do you suppose old times wouldn't come to the rescue?"

The Rector was hitting hard. He could see it in the compressed lips, the nostril and eyelid and brow that would not be still, in the face that was hard to control at the best of times. Why could he not keep to his artillery? Why send his troops into the enemy's country, bristling with ambuscades? Why bring Judith's image back, when all the strength of his case lay in revival of the days gone by?

But he did, possibly because he could not conceive of a passion for one woman dwelling in the same heart with an affection for another. He could not measure the force of the personal factor in Judith. He had never been under fire.

"And see," he went on injudiciously—"see what it is you look to gain when you have cut yourself finally adrift from almost everything that has been precious to you in the past. What are the chances of happiness for a couple so assorted? Think of your difference of age! . . . well!—perhaps that's the least important point . . . think of the difference in the habits of a life-time, of the sort of life Judith has been accustomed to, of the way her pride may suffer . . . and not only hers—yours too—yours too, my dear Challis, in a thousand ways! Consider this too; what right have you to take for granted that she will ever be forgiven by her family? You say they are now at daggers drawn. What claim have you to ask such a sacrifice of

her as the surrender of her relations with her parents and all the associations of her childhood? Think of it!"

A moment after he perceived he had pushed his argument too far. Challis said firmly, "I accept Judith's readiness to make this sacrifice as a sure proof of her feelings towards myself. I see in it a guarantee of a happiness far beyond my deserts. It is *because* she is ready to give up so much for me and risk her whole life in my keeping that I am rushing the position. I cannot have her think hereafter that our union was made impossible by my remissness—by my *fainéantise*—at a critical time."

The Rector walked uneasily about the room. "Oh dear," said he, "I wish to Heaven that Bill would get itself brought into the Lords and rejected, *tout à l'improviste*, before you could arrange this madness. Then you would have a cool twelvemonth to think it over in. And perhaps you would both come to your senses."

"And perhaps—*d'autant plus à l'improviste*—that Bill would pass the Lords and become law. How should I seem then to the girl who is ready to throw all away for me now? Do you conceive that I should be able to console myself for the wrong I had done by dragging back to my home a wife whose jealousy . . . I must call it so—poor Polly Anne! . . ."

"What else can you call it?"

"There's no other word in the dictionary. What was I saying? . . . oh, a wife whose jealousy would by that time have every justification. Where would the happiness be in all that, and for whom?"

"In no case can you hope for an immediate reconstitution of your old home life. You, Challis—excuse me—have stirred up too much mud for the pool to become clear in a moment. But remember Disraeli's phrase—the 'magic of patience.'"

"A good phrase, a very good phrase! I am game for any amount of Hope, dear Yorick—hypothetical Hope, of a state of things that will never come about! If it did, I might get some sort of consolation out of it. What would Judith?"

The Rector was handicapped by his disbelief in Judith, whom he did not credit with overmuch heart; certainly

not with one that would break on slight provocation. He could not say anything of this to this passionate fool of a man, over head and ears in love. Or he might have replied, "Don't you fret about Judith. *She'll* be all right enough." As it was, he could only keep closed lips, and pace about the room. Challis continued:

"And, after all, we are leaving the most probable possibility of the lot quite out in the cold. Suppose the mad scheme—Judith's marriage with me—does *not* come off, and the Bill passes. Suppose that I am inconsequent enough to jump at the new-fledged legal powers of depriving Marianne of her children, after damning her uphill and down for doing the very same thing herself; suppose me with my family back on the hearth—crying and frightened, probably—and never a mother to see to them! Suppose, in fact, that Marianne stands to her guns! How then?"

"Other men have been in the same position before now." Perhaps the speaker was thinking of himself.

"Can you name a case in which no substitute for the mother existed, and the father was not at liberty to provide one? Please exclude salaried employees from the answer."

"Oh, I wasn't going to go that length. Heaven forbid!"

"You must observe," Challis continued, "that divorce *a vinculo* is only available if my wife arranges about the co-respondent. *I can't!*" He added in a voice that showed how strangely racked his feelings were, "Poor Polly Anne!—she wouldn't the least know how to set about it."

"I'm *horribly* sorry for you, Challis," said the Rector. "I am indeed! I would go the length of wishing that bigamy could be sanctioned, in certain cases, only that you are quite the wrong man for it. You wouldn't enjoy it."

"Have I not a foretaste of its horrors?" said Challis. "You see, Yorick dear, when Love comes in at the door, Patriarchal ideas fly out at the window. Jacob was a cucumber. I'm not!"

"Well!—Jacob must have loved Rachel, after a fashion. Seven years!... consider!..."

"Oughtn't it to be read 'weeks,' perhaps? Criticism is very accommodating about the seven days of Creation. Make it weeks." The conversation became irrelevant.

But after a good deal more talk of the same sort, an hour later, Challis said, "You're not a consistent Rector, do you know! You said when we began that you couldn't and wouldn't advise me. And you have substantially advised me to tell Judith to-morrow that we must leave the forelock of opportunity alone, and just take our chance of a permanent veto on matrimony, if that Bill goes through the Lords."

"Well!—yes! At least, it comes to the same thing. It has leaked out in conversation what I should have said to you if I had thought you would take my advice. . . ."

"Which would have been . . . ?"

"Which would have been, 'On no account take an irrevocable step under pressure.' Believe me, Challis, if you do this thing, and this Bill never becomes law at all, and then you live to repent of the knot you have tied indissolubly, the thought hereafter that you gave way to a needless panic will make remorse tenfold more bitter."

"Are not you, when you say that, allowing a disbelief in the Bill's passing to influence you?"

"I may be, a little. But not nearly so much as I am by a belief I must try to explain to you . . . well!—it's none so easy. But I thought I had succeeded in explaining it to myself too." He paused a few seconds, then got clearer. "It's something like this. I can't conceive that any retrospective clause of the Act could declare valid a marriage the illegitimacy of which the parties themselves had acknowledged during the period of its legal invalidity. Do you see? . . . You would very likely word it more clearly than I can."

"No—that's as clear as daylight. But I am not prepared to acknowledge the illegitimacy of my marriage with Marianne."

"How can you act upon it, to the extent of marrying another woman, without acknowledging it?"

"If I were not under compulsion to acknowledge it, should I ever have thought of marrying the other woman? I plead coercion. Marianne dissolved our marriage. I had no hand in it."

"Coercion or no," said the Rector, "it comes to the same thing. No retrospective clause could declare valid



a marriage that had been voided by one of the parties yielding to a coercion quite within the rights of the other to impose. Not that I'm sure there isn't a sort of general legal usage, that no one can claim legal advantage from the illegality of his own action."

"I see," said Challis. "Heads, deceased sister's husband wins. Tails, deceased wife's sister loses! But how would such an interpretation of retrospective action affect me and Judith?"

"Why, clearly! If the Bill passed ever so, your marriage with Marianne would remain void. It would class with any other contract, illegal at the time, whose illegality had been subsequently acknowledged and acted on. I heard once of a curious case in point. Two young people had got married, knowing nothing of a consanguinity between them, owing to an old family quarrel. The girl was really a very much junior aunt of the young man; their respective mothers, daughters of the same father, having been born forty years apart. Of course, the children of this atrocious marriage were illegitimate."

"Did they part when they found it out?"

"Oh dear no! They brazened it out—said the meaning of the term 'aunt' was clear. Aunts had fronts, and so forth. The gentleman calls his wife aunty to this day, I believe. Perhaps you've seen the people? They've a large property in the South Riding or Yorkshire."

But Challis hadn't, and didn't know their name when mentioned. He seemed more interested in his own affairs. "If I understand you," said he, "your advice is—not to marry, in view of the possibility of this new enactment not acting retrospectively in cases of couples disunited by mutual consent, at a time when law held that no union existed. Let's pretend my consent was given, this time, for argument's sake."

"You have stated the case admirably. That is my advice. Wait!"

"You have a beautiful confidence, Yorick, in Acts of Parliament—before they are made! Would it be reinforced or weakened, I wonder, by a perusal of the Statutes at Large? Doesn't an element of hopefulness come in?"

"Hm—well—perhaps! That's my advice, anyhow."

And that's the advice I shall give to Judith Arkroyd, if she comes to consult me. I shan't volunteer anything."

"I wish I could think as you do—about the effect of the Act, I mean." Challis's manner was to the last degree fitful and uneasy. "I mean I wish I could be sure it would leave the question open."

The Rector, returning to his friend's side after one of his walks about the room, laid his strong hand on his shoulder, and the sense of its strength was welcome. "Challis, Challis!" said he earnestly, "can you not read in your own words how well you know that you are acting under panic? Ask your heart—ask your conscience—if a wish for an extension of time would be possible in a mind really made up—a mind really believing such a step as you propose to take a right and honourable one! Confess that the reason you would be glad of a respite is that you are none so sure, after all, that what you do is the wisest course for either yourself or your wife; or, for that matter, for Judith."

Challis seemed for a moment puzzled about his meaning. Then he said, "Do you mean that you doubt the reality of my—of my love for Judith?" He seemed half ashamed of it, too!

"I mean that I think you are besotted about her—bewitched by her woman's beauty—the slave of an inclination you may live to repent one day in sackcloth and ashes. Well!—one can understand it all, down to the ground. You are not the first..."

Challis flushed a little angrily, and began, "Do you mean that Judith is..." He hesitated.

The Rector caught his meaning, and interrupted him. "A flirt?" said he. "No—I didn't mean that; though, mind you, I can't give the young lady complete absolution on that score. What I meant was that mighty few men in the world get through life without knowing all about this sort of thing from experience. Perhaps your catching the fever so late in life, after two marriages, makes the case exceptional. However, as I told you, I don't regard you as a rational being at present; so I won't preach."

He had not removed his hand from Challis's shoulder, and the action of the latter as he turned away and crossing

to the window looked out at the starlit night, had its shade of protest in it, though it could not be said that he had exactly shaken the hand off.

Athelstan Taylor waited a moment, looking half sorry, half amused, but not the least disposed to weaken his words. Then he followed his friend to where he stood looking out, and said as he replaced his hand—only that this time he laid his arm fully across the shoulder—"Remember the compact, my good man, remember the compact! I'm to say what I like."

"You are to say what you like, dear Yorick, and soften nothing. You think me a fool, and I am one. But the fact that my folly is carried *nem. con* won't get me out of the difficulty it has got me into. Blame it as you will—but your blame won't answer the question I ask myself every hour of the day: what sort of value will Judith set on the love of a man who hung fire about carrying out his pledges till it was too late, on the miserable plea that it was ten chances to one another twelvemonth of vacillation might be possible? What right has any man to put expediencies, calculations of chance, the unforeseen outcomes of this or that, against the well-being of the woman he is all the while coolly asking to give herself away to him? No, Yorick, I haven't got it in me to go and say to Judith, 'I love you; it is true. But if I wed you now, while we know we are free to wed, and then some time repentance comes, it will be a bitter thought to me that—had I waited . . . et cetera'—don't you see?"

"My dear Challis, I am no match for the eloquence of a gifted author who is pleading the cause of his own inclinations. . . ."

"Even when he ends up with 'et cetera'?"

"Even then. But remember this—that what I am saying to you now is scarcely meant as urging definite action upon yourself. It may have seemed so in form, but my actual meaning has been to show the sort of advice I shall give Judith if I have the good fortune to speak with her in time; if, that is, she gives me the right to speak by speaking first herself. I shall do the same with the Bart. and her ladyship. If they don't take me into their confidence, I shall presume they don't want me to share it."

"Talk to Judith by all means. But Judith won't counsel delay—I feel sure of it—if she supposes that I shall think she has done so for my sake. She knows perfectly well that the readier she is to sacrifice herself for me, the keener I shall be to confiscate the knife. If she were to plead against this hasty action that she herself felt insecure in it—would rather run the risks, on the chances—that would be quite another matter. But she won't do that."

"If it comes to cross-fires of reciprocal misgivings and misunderstandings—or understandings, if you like—between you and Judith Arkroyd, I give up, and there's an end on't!" The Rector's laugh made the atmosphere happier. "But I'm afraid my general conclusion is that man is never at a loss for good reasons for doing anything he wants to do, especially when it involves a lady."

"You may be right. But it's a horrible perplexity."

Athelstan Taylor was lighting candles for bed. For it was past midnight. As he took Challis's hand to say good-night, he said to him: "We superstitious, old-world, out-of-date folk, priests and the like, are in the habit of praying to be guided right in horrible perplexities. Is it any use . . . ?"

"Well!—plenty of use as far as my good-will to feel with you is concerned? But to my inner vision, none! To my thought, Omnipotence is already doing everything—everything everywhere—and I don't see how I could put up a prayer to the Top Bloke . . . pardon my using an expression you object to . . ."

"Not at all. Go on."

" . . . A prayer to guide me right without appearing to suggest either that He was already guiding me wrong, or that the Bottom Bloke—no one can possibly object to that—had usurped his functions."

Strange to say, the Rector seemed not the least shocked. On the contrary, he laughed. "All right, old chap," said he. "You leave yourself in the hands of the Top Bloke. He'll see to it all right. Good-night!" But he looked back as he opened his bedroom door to say, "Keep the gas on till you have the electric light."

## CHAPTER XLV

It was early morning at Trout Bend, and the man who sat on the moss-grown beechen root this story told of—more than a year ago now—was turning over in his heart all that had come about in that short time, and trying to say to himself point-blank that it was no fault of his own. He succeeded in saying it—said it aloud in words, that there should be no doubt at all about it. He said it twice, in fact, and seemed in the end dissatisfied.

Every little incident of the day's life seemed to throw doubt on the point. The discordant jay that shrieked in the thicket as good as cried out "Liar!" and fluttered away disgusted. The squirrel that paused half-way up the beech-trunk had an air of shocked reproach in his very large and startled eye, and when he moved again seemed to want to get out of the way as soon as possible, and to mix with sincere Society again. The fish that leaped in the pool had come to the surface this time, clearly, to say to Challis: "We have met before, and my life has not changed. Yours has, and you have only yourself to thank for it! Why need you leave your native waters uncompelled?"

Challis denied the suggestion his own mind had made. He had had no share in what followed; his exodus from those waters had been compulsory. Or, rather, was it not true that the waters had drained away from him, and left him to find another pool down-stream, or die unnourished on the dry sands? But it was a metaphor that rang false, and he dismissed it impatiently; the more so that some mental distortion, akin to the one he invented the strange name for, must needs intrude an unwarranted image of an angler with rod and line, and rouse him to an indignant denial of that angler's identity. Whose fault soever it was, it was none of Judith's.

And as he thought this, there she was herself, crossing the little plank bridge where the convict dropped the ring, and found it again so many years too late.

He was on his feet in a moment, and on his way to meet her. He had a double-barrelled kiss ready on his lips, supposing the coast clear at the moment of their meeting. Saladin, who was present, was in confidence, and didn't count. Botheration take that old woman gathering sticks!—did she matter?

Judith thought so, evidently, and payment had to wait. "Company!" said she. She was looking as beautiful as ever—more so! "She's a hundred and two, I believe," she added. "But one has to lay down a rule in these matters, and stick to it." She was referring to the old woman, who most likely neither saw nor heard, or if she did, only harked back to eighty years ago, and thought, "Why not?"

All Challis's cloud of doubt and self-reproach vanished as her consolatory hand lay in his arm. Something of her masterful nature was in the touch of it, communicable through nerve-currents. It reassured him, and he could respond to its pressure, old woman or no!

It was an arranged meeting: much taken for granted. Conversation to go on presently where our last meeting left it. Meanwhile, short recognitions of current event.

"When did you come?"

"The day before yesterday."

"The voice of gossip cannot say you followed me down here. Not that it would matter!"

"I fancy we are pretty transparent." Challis dismissed the matter as a slight interest only. "Are we peaceful at the Hall?"

"Oh—well! One short row—a very small one! It's rather unfortunate that some people who were expected have cried off. And another gang had just gone. So my dear parents . . . to whom I am really devoted; and they are so good and upright and that sort of thing . . . what was I saying about them?—oh yes!—my dear parents and I were alone. It was unlucky." Challis threw up his eyebrows very slightly, and made a barely audible note of interrogation through closed lips. She replied to it:

"Yes—the usual sort of thing." And they walked on slowly arm in arm, not speaking.

Presently the lady resumed, seeming always the more talkative of the two: "Compulsory truce this evening, I suppose. Most likely Sibyl and Frank, who, I understand, is ridiculous about Sib. Besides, Mr. What's-his-name is coming . . . what is his name?" . . .

"Tell me who he is, and I'll see if I know."

"Oh dear!—man that talks metaphysics. . . ."

"Brownrigg?"

"Of course! Brownrigg. Well!—he's coming this afternoon, so we've only time for a very short allowance of Family Life. I suspect Brownrigg of having an Attraction down here, but I can't for the life of me find out who it is!"

"Attractions are feminine?"

"Always."

"Otherwise I should have thought it might be the Rector."

"The Reverend Athelstan—dear good man! Oh no—it's a lady! It always is. But did the Reverend speak of Broadribb—Brownrigg?"

"I've got an impression that he has been at the Rectory more than once—considerably more. Couldn't exactly say why."

"There's nothing feminine there—at the Rectory."

Challis was beginning, "Oh yes!—there's . . ." when Judith's outburst of laughter cut him short.

"Dear Aunt Bessy! She's forty. . . . Oh yes, I know she's worthy!" She laughed more than need was; then recovered her gravity, and said, as though she feared her laughter might have grated on her companion: "Not to laugh at the good lady?—is that it? Very well." Judith's mockery for once seemed just short of charming to her lover, to whom it was usually one of her happiest contrasts to Marianne's unsympathetic reverence for so many things her husband's derision classed as beadledom. This time he would have preferred that the time-honoured practice of making game of old maidenhood should have been touched with a lighter hand. There was suggestion of a consciousness of this in Judith's next words: "It was

your fault, you know, Titus, for hinting at Brownrigg. It was quite too funny."

Her fascination reasserted itself; indeed, its wavering had been of the slightest, and had not lasted long enough for acknowledgment. "I admit it was a laughable notion," said Challis. "However, I don't think an enchantress is necessary in this case. Athelstan Taylor would account for anything, and you know he is liberality itself towards all new ideas. He told me yesterday he thought Graubosch a most interesting personality."

"Did you—you say you had come yesterday?"

"No—the night before."

"You and the great Yorick—isn't that what his friend Miss Foster calls him?—haven't been talking of Graubosch all that time?"

"Fossett. Oh dear no! We have been talking chiefly of..." A pause. "... Well!—of *our* affairs."

"Meaning yours and mine. *Eh bien*!—and what says Sir Oracle?... No, no!—no irreverence, indeed!... oh no!—you *said* nothing. But you have such a mobile countenance." A shade of protest had been detectable, presumably, in Challis's face, and he had disclaimed it.

"Meaning your affairs and mine," said he, with only a pooh-pooh smile for the sub-colloquy. "Sir Oracle is in opposition."

"I knew he would be—dear good man! You'll tell me I'm sneering, I know—but I'm not—if I say..."

"What?"

"That his is such a beautiful unworldly character. I can tell you exactly what he said to you."

"Then, dearest, I needn't tell you. Fire away!"

"He said we must on no account take an irrevocable step in a hurry; and must trust to Providence to keep His eye on the Lords when the division comes, and make sure of a majority against the Bill."

"He said something not very unlike it. A good shot! But he never suggested that Providence was disposed to consider *our* interests. I must admit that I don't see why Providence should. My own attitude has hardly been conciliatory." Challis then went on to give a fairer version of what the Rector had said. As he spoke, a



touch of scorn came on the beautiful face beside him, and grew and grew. And he fancied the pressure of the hand on his sleeve lightened.

"A thorough business man's view!" said Judith, when he stopped. "Scarcely so unworldly on the whole as our good Yorick generally is! I don't know, though, whether I ought to say that. Beautiful unworldly characters manage their affairs unselfishly only because..."

"Because they think Providence will act as their agent? Is that what you were going to say?"

"Well!—they always boast that it pays best in the long-run. Anyhow, this clearly *was* the business view. To the business mind, with its faith in Law and Order and Representative Government and things, nothing can be clearer. You and Marianne have cried off a compact Law and Order condemned, while you still had a right to do so. Is it credible that the New Act will tie you together again, willy-nilly?"

"Dearest!—try to see my difficulty. Don't think me cowardly or politic; only believe that it *is* a difficulty to me, and a serious one. Suppose us wedded—to-morrow—before the passing of the Act, anyhow! Suppose that when it comes it legitimates retrospectively every marriage that was not acknowledged void by *both* parties while it was still an unlawful one!"

Judith withdrew her hand and looked away. "Have you not acknowledged the illegitimacy of yours?" she said coldly.

"In a sense I have." Challis was evidently flinching under his consciousness of his position.

"I do not like 'in a sense,' Titus. Is Marianne your wife or not?"

"Listen to me, dearest!" He would have replaced her hand in his arm, but she withstood his doing so, partly qualifying her resistance by a pretence of finding Saladin's whistle. He continued pleadingly: "Think what it would be for me if at some future time my two little girls were to suffer from a reproach their brother does not share, and charge me with giving my boy a better hold on the world than they could lay claim to..."

"It was their reproach from the beginning..."

"Yes—yes! But suppose this Act would, but for me, have conferred legitimacy retrospectively...."

"How 'but for you'!"

"Why—clearly! It might include in its retrospective action only such marriages as were held valid by one or other party at the date of the passing of the Bill. Mumps and Chobbles might be legitimate or no, according to my attitude towards their mother about our separation. It seems to me that my having refused to acknowledge it might make all the difference...." Challis paused awkwardly. For he had suddenly become aware that he was adducing reasons in plenty why he should not marry Judith at all. He had not meant his argument to go that length. He was only showing one form the Nemesis of Repentance might take in the event of the immediate passing of the Act. He was losing sight of the fact that if the Bill was thrown out, all his reasonings would apply just as much to a more leisurely union during the twelve-month of respite.

The fact is he wanted to eat his cake and have it too—to get the advantage of the Act for his children and to avoid the guillotine himself. If he and Judith were not married in time, either their project would be made impossible, or at best the problem of justice or injustice to the children would stand over *sine die*, with all its present difficulties unsolved. If, on the other hand, they got married, the Act could only benefit his children by affirming his marriage with their mother a lawful one, and declaring Judith the second wife of a bigamist. Unless, indeed, a dexterous special clause in it gave his rupture with Marianne the validity of a divorce. Not a very likely provision of legal ingenuity!

How little idea the old lady gathering sticks must have had of what the gentleman was talking—talking—talking about to the lady, whose undisturbed beauty seemed to make no response, or barely a word now and then! Her centenarian mind probably thought it was only the usual thing—the use of eighty odd years ago, when she first knew of it; and so till now, except folk were changed since then.

But the gentleman would have done well to say less.

None of his earnestness, none of his perturbation—none of his Law, none of his Logic—made matters a bit better. In one way they made it worse. A sense of a painful contingency crept in, that had hardly had sufficient consideration. How if in the labyrinth of possibilities that sheer Legalism can construct over the grave of Fair Play there was really hidden a possible indictment for bigamy? If Challis married Judith, his first wife being still alive, with the reservation that the latter wasn't his wife at all, how then? Could he even obtain a Special Licence at Doctors' Commons? He would have to declare that no legal impediment existed, and to satisfy the Archbishop of Canterbury that his reasons for wanting it were sound. Perhaps his Grace would be crusty, and refuse it, to spite him for marrying his Deceased Wife's Sister. However, the idea of a piqued Prelate hitting below the belt in this way relieved a growing tension, and brought a smile into the matter.

Challis was glad to shift away from a perplexity. After a pause of silence he said: "Do you remember how we walked here—more than a year ago—and you told me you had given up the idea of Estrild?"

Judith replaced the hand she had taken away. "Oh, so well!" said she. "I was so sorry. But it seems to me that if my dearly-beloved family are going to quarrel with me about my marriage, I deserve to play Estrild as a set-off. I shall think about it."

They came to the coppice-wood, and the half-shade of its light and shadow-chequered path was grateful; for the sun was mounting, and his heat beginning to tell. Saladin brushed roughly past them, to see—at a guess—that all the tree-stems were in order. Judith leaned a little more on the arm she held.

"Do you remember," said she, "how I called you Scroop, and how funny it made you look? Oh dear, how strange it does all seem!"

"I remember. And how I couldn't well call you Judith back. Would you have been offended?"

"Should I ever have been offended at anything you did, dear love?" Her hand was pressed between his arm and the other hand, that had come across to caress it.

The two of them had the little secluded path well to themselves ; certainly Saladin didn't count. Now was the time for those kisses that had waited, and others, if need were. Challis, as he took Judith Arkroyd to his heart, felt his own past grow insignificant and dim. This was Life !

A phantasmagoric presentment of Great Coram Street and Wimbledon ran rapidly across the background of his mind. It was wonderful how many images he could feel the dimness of at once. Even so, the man who fell off the Monument marvelled at the incredible grasp of his powers of recollection, stung to a paroxysm of self-assertion. Why need so many things appeal to be forgotten ; each one a bygone to itself ; a faint spark, surely, but craving a separate extinction ! He could feel—oh yes !—he could feel—that the nourishments of his life in those days were the merest refreshments. This was a banquet ! He had attained to a satiety of Love. But why need those all-but-forgotten satisfactions of an unpretentious past thrust in their claims for recollection, each with its ill-timed reproach—" You did not despise us then !" ?

There was no need for him to forget Kate. She was little more now than a bad misadventure of his early life. But there was many a little memory of Marianne in the earlier days that he would have to oust from the future unless his every hour was to be cross-textured with a web of self-reproach. One little paltry thing went near to madden him with its importunity. Could he never touch the damask cheek of his enchantress of to-day without an intrusion into his mind of—Marianne's mole ? Too ridiculous !—many will say. But there it was—the mole—back in this man's inner vision, to plague him with a reminder of that long-ago when he rallied its proprietor—Marianne was eighteen then—on its possession, but congratulated himself at the same time that it was not in the best place.

The story knows Challis too well to attempt to make the oddities of his mind plausible ; it can only vouch for them. About minds it cannot vouch for, only speculation is open to it. It makes no pretence to know the inner heart of the beautiful woman whom he conceives to be so en-

tirely his own. Whether what followed was, on her part, schemed to make all wavering on his impossible, and to bind that skein of his life fast in hers, or whether it was really what it seemed, she alone could tell. The story has no blame for her, mind, if it was the former! She was within her rights—every woman's rights.

"Oh, Scroop—dear Titus—dear love! Let's have done with it and forget it all—all! It can never be, and we both know it." He had released her waist at some sound of footsteps approaching them as they stood in the pathway, but had kept her hands in his. Whoever it was was not in sight yet.

"Odsbodikins, dearest, why—why—why? Why this of a sudden, out of the blue?"

"No—dearest—no!—it is truth. I *am* in earnest, indeed. It *cannot* be!" He would have taken her in his arms again, but her outstretched hand on his breast repelled him. "It must come to an end, and we know it. . . . No—do not!" . . .

"Then tell me, darling, quietly; why not—why now?"

"Listen, Scroop! I see it all so clearly. Yorick is right—good, clear-sighted man! If we get married in a mad hurry, under pressure, just to avoid this legislative Bill business. . . ."

"Cutting the ground from under our feet? Yes!"

"We may, as he says, live to repent it. After all, we are human!" The footsteps drew nearer—became a passing boy—caused a pause, and died away, leaving Judith to continue: "Suppose that all goes ill, and our fruits turn out Dead Sea apples, and so on! Suppose that you are disappointed in me! . . ."

"Never!"

"Foolish man, how can you tell? . . . However, this you *can* see: that if we fell out, you and I, anyhow, it would be a bitter thought to you that you had sacrificed your girls for my sake, as you would have done! You said so yourself, and I see it."

"The blame would not be mine." Challis got it said, but only just. He knew at least that he was dishonest in shirking his share of the blame. He went on to excuse,

and, of course, accuse, himself. "What right had Marianne to imagine infidelities for me?... Yes!—I grant you 'infidelity' is a long word. But see what I mean, and think of it. Marianne had not a particle of evidence that... that you were to me... anything that any other lady is not. She was just as wrong in building false constructions on no grounds at all...."

"On no grounds at all! Be fair to Marianne!"

"Well—on very little!... She was just as unjust in using what she *did* know to condemn me as if the things she did *not* know had never happened. The accident of the postscript might have happened a thousand times with any stranger. As to anything else that had passed between you and me, Marianne chose to take action without a particle of proof, and she is to blame for the consequence. Yes, Judith; if Marianne hadn't acted as she did, I should have locked you out of my heart, and gone my way in silence."

"Would you?" asked Judith. It might have been reproach; but, then, it might have been mere questioning of his words. Challis gave himself the benefit of the doubt, and let Judith go on. "And if you had, do you think Marianne wouldn't have found you out? Oh, Scroop, Scroop, do you think women have no eyes?" She had a half-laugh for what she ended with: "You and your proofs and particles of evidence!"

He gave up the point. "Then let us whitewash Marianne," said he, "and make it all my fault. How much nearer are we—how much nearer to plain sailing? It seems to me I have to choose between a chance—only a chance, mind you!—of a legal sanction for the babies... and, really, dearest, it's not a thing I have ever fretted much about...."

"But you ought to have. What's the other choice?"

"... Between a chance of legitimacy for them and a certainty of not losing you. Can you wonder that I, thinking as I do of these legalities, should choose the last?"

"Listen, Scroop, and don't puzzle me with any more arguments. You make my head spin. I can only see the thing as I believe any woman would see it. This Parlia-

mentary business may cut us asunder for ever; because you know if the Bill passes you won't be able to divorce Marianne. If I am to give you up, I want to do it here and now—to get it done and part at once, for good. . . .”

“I cannot give you up. . . .”

“And we cannot linger on through a life of miserable uncertainty. Fancy it!—next year the whole question over again—the same doubts—the same arguments! No—let us part and have done with it!”

“You do not mean what you say.”

“Perhaps not. Perhaps I am only flinching like a coward from a life that might be unendurable. I would rather have my tooth out altogether than have it ache for a twelvemonth. So what can I say now? I am ready, if it can be arranged—that I don't know about. . . .”

He interrupted her. “And I am ready—more than ready!” And this time she did not repel him as he took her in his arms.

“But mind, dearest,” said she, “if it were a certainty about the little girls, I should still say we ought to hesitate. But . . .”

“But it isn't certainty—even if the Bill passes ever so!” He sealed the compact on her lips—on her cheeks. It was a *fait accompli*.

But nothing could keep all those memories of the past quite, quite in the background. They were all in evidence—dim evidence; yes!—even that confounded mole on Marianne's cheek.

The day had become quite hot when the centenarian faggot-binder saw the lady and the great dog say adieu to the gentleman in the light summer suit, and noted with some satisfaction that the adieu was a loving one. The gentleman seemed to watch the vanishing sunshade, in such request against the heat, across the little bridge and out of sight, to the last; then lit a cigar, and, passing near her, said “Good-morning,” and unprovokedly gave her what she thought a welcome sixpence. That old lady and her great-great-grandchild called at the Hall next day to say the gentleman had given her half-a-sovereign by mis-

take, and, enquiry connecting the gentleman with Miss Arkroyd, procured the opinion of the latter that of course the gentleman meant old Mrs. Inderwick to have it. Who thereupon consigned it to a Georgian purse, and departed with benedictions.

But before Challis and Judith parted they had planned their campaign. And it only just came short of a prompt marriage by special licence. Concession was made on two points; one was regarded as almost out of court—namely, the chance that such a union could be regarded as bigamous. For was it conceivable that a law that quashed his paternity of his own children could indict him for his marriage with their mother? It seemed grotesque; but was worth a word, in view of the pranks of Themis.

The other point was this: So great a certainty might exist among political informants that the Bill would be thrown out in the Lords as to make the proposed step a ridiculously strained precaution, and needless under the circumstances. Unanimity of one or two strong Parliamentary authorities would be practical certainty, if they held to their opinions up to the brink of the division. If the political sky changed, causing them to waver, prompt action might be necessary.

In any case Challis was to procure a special licence, to be used or otherwise, at discretion, the date chosen being as late as he should think safe under the circumstances. Several minor difficulties had to be disposed of, but the only point necessary to the story is that Judith was to hold herself in readiness to become a bride at a short notice, and that Challis was to be answerable for time and place and the making of all the necessary arrangements. Trousseaux, travelling gear, and the like, did not need consideration at present. For, in fact, both parties distinctly understood this marriage to be a mere precautionary measure, legally irrevocable, but otherwise *nil*. The bride would return to her paternal hearth, and might even make no allusion to the little event of the morning. The birds would not nest, but their names would be entered as man and wife on some parish register.

Challis said nothing to Atheistan Taylor of this scheme.



He did not wish to put his friend to the necessity of either concealing it and assenting to it, or declaring it and fighting it. It seemed to him that the Rector would be compelled to an attitude of protest by his position, and that the most prudent as well as the fairest course for himself would be to hold his tongue.

So he finished his visit at the Rectory, and bade fare-  
well.

## CHAPTER XLVI

THE tide was coming in at Chalk Cliff, and the Children, meaning thereby all those on the coast at the time, were little glowing spots of perfect unconcern; entire freedom from care, from memory of the past and apprehension for the future; things as unencumbered of responsibility and pain as tracts of smooth and furrowed sands, beneath a broiling July sun, with endless pools at choice awaiting the returning flood, and little boats to navigate them, and nets to capture prawns, and sand-castles and spades and wooden panniers you could pat the sand into, could make them. And the Children were paddling in the pools, and insuring swift and prosperous passages to the vessels under their control by pushing them—for there was never a breath of wind—and chasing elusive prawns and unknown specimens beneath the rocks, and putting their fingers in anemones, and molesting crabs, and not succeeding in removing limpets suddenly from their holdings, because the limpets were too sharp for them. Also they were hard at work, the more purposeful ones, erecting sand castles the very self-same shape as the limpets, and meeting in the middle, when they—the Children—burrowed from opposite sides to complete the said castles with four or even more tunnels, essential to perfect structure; and, ending with their country's flag, in tin, upon the summit, contentedly awaited the coming of the tide to wash it all away, and leave them new clean spaces for to-morrow.

Why is Lizarann content to watch the Children in the sun, to be dissociated from them as she lies upon the sand in the shade of that big white umbrella a guardian nurse manipulates in her interest? Why does she not seize the glorious opportunities of Life at its best; of Life those babies yonder, too happy now to measure their own happiness, will look back on one day not so very far hence as

a sweet Elysium of the past, a heaven of unquestioning content the clouds of the years to come will never let them know again? Why does Lizarann—our Lizarann!—prefer to lie still and converse with the good woman who has charge of her?

Well!—you see, she got tired with the journey yesterday. That's all. You'll see she'll pick up when she's been here a few days, and the sea air has had time to tell. Besides, it is notorious that its first effect on you is always enervating; and then you take quinine, and it gives you a headache.

Whatever the cause, Lizarann accepted the effect, and was content to watch the Children in the middle zone of best building sand, not too wet and not too dry, all working hard to be ready for the tide that was heralding its coming in a major key, as is the manner of tides that have died sadly away to sea, six hours since, in a minor. A false musical metaphor to him whose hearing goes no deeper than the surface of sound—true! But not to Lizarann, though she knew as little as we how to word the difference rightly between the joy of the sea returning and the lament of its departure. For this is written because Lizarann wanted to ask the lady in charge of her questions about this varied sounding of the waters, noted by her in the wakeful hours of her first night at the nursing-home.

This lady was benevolent, Lizarann was convinced. But for all that, she was like the stout Chinese carved in wood who sat all day long in the window of the tea-shop Aunt Stingy bought a quarter of a pound at a time at, nearly opposite Trett Street. Only then this image was evidently a portrait of a benevolent Chinese, of whom no little girl would have been afraid to ask questions about the tides. Lizarann reasoned on the position before she ventured on speech. Then she said: "I heard that all the time I was in bed. Yass!—through the open window."

"Poor little woman!" said the lady. "Yes, my dear, that's the water. It's the sound it makes."

"It didn't kept me awike," said Lizarann, anxious not to reflect upon the sea, of which she knew her Daddy had a high opinion. But the lady had said, "Poor little woman!" on general principles; not, as the little girl supposed, with reference to wakefulness caused by it.

"Some little girls like it very much," was the comment.

Lizarann wished this lady had thrown out a hint, for her guidance, as to whether these were good little girls or bad little girls. She would have to risk something, evidently. "I like it very much, please," she said tentatively. "Please, ma'am, don't you?"

"I can't say I do, my dear. It fusses me. But then I sleep at the back." Lizarann was disappointed. She had, in fact, been cherishing an idea that the Mandarin-like, placid seeming of this lady had resulted from the soothing lullaby of the ocean, heard night and day. Clearly it would be safest to leave personal experiences and speak of Physical Geography. Lizarann had a question to ask:

"Did it went on just like that when my Daddy went viyages aboardship?"

"Did it go on just like that? Yes, dear! It went on just like that. More so, sometimes!"

"Louderer and louderer? And then it blowed a gale?"

"And then it blew a gale. I dare say." The Mandarin looked benevolently round at her patient, and added: "We're very nautical."

Now Lizarann missed the last syllable, and therefore thought that she and the lady, for some reason unknown, were very naughty. Of course, the lady knew best; and, as she herself was inculpated, would never be so dishonourable as to tell. So Lizarann asked for no explanations. But she wanted to know about the tides, and some points in navigation. Presently an incident supplied a text.

"Why did the lady ran away from the water?"

"Because she didn't want wet stockings." Yes—that was clear enough. But why did the water run after the lady?—Lizarann asked, recasting her question. "Because the tide's coming in," said her informant.

Explanations followed—not embarrassingly deep ones; the moon was left out altogether. The water would come right up to where we were at two o'clock because it was spring-tide. Then it would go back again for the same reason; which seemed inconsistent to Lizarann, who was no politician. But she was not really keen about the physical questions involved. As soon as courtesy permitted, she reintroduced her personal interest.

"When my Daddy was sarving aboardship"—it was funny to hear the child repeat her father's words, said the Mandarin after—"did he seed the water go in and out, like we do?"

"If he was on the coast."

"Are we on the scoast?"

"We are at Chalk Cliff, and Chalk Cliff's on the coast." Lizarann didn't see why we should wash our hands of the coast, and throw the whole responsibility on Chalk Cliff. But she accepted this too; only, further definition would be welcome.

"Those are ships?" she half asked, half affirmed, looking out to sea.

"Those are ships. Some big, some little."

"Are they on the scoast?"

"Oh dear no!—miles away." Then Lizarann was beginning, languidly, a demonstration that her Daddy, when voyaging on board ship, could not also be on the coast and observe the tides, when the Mandarin—good, well-intentioned woman that she was—must needs feel her patient's pulse, and say she mustn't talk too much and make herself cough, and advised her to lie quiet, and even go to sleep. Lizarann repudiated sleep, as she wanted to watch the life around, and was only wishing she hadn't got so tired with that railway-journey yesterday. It would have been so nice to catch prawns and make sand-castles, like the Children. But she acquiesced in inaction, to her own surprise; and to her still greater surprise waked suddenly, shortly after, from a dream of Bridgetticks and her small self building sand-castles in the gutter in Tallack Street, and terribly in dread of the Boys.

Still, through it all, the little patient saw nothing strange in her own readiness to submit to being nursed. She was first and foremost among the disbelievers in the seriousness of her malady, and ascribed all the solicitude that was being shown about her to an epidemic of public benevolence, more or less due to misapprehensions set on foot by Dr. Spiderophel's imperfect auscultations. It was a whim he had inoculated a kind-hearted world with; and she felt, for some reason she could not analyse, that it was easiest to indulge it.

So when her eyes opened again on the glorious vision of the great wide sea her Daddy had told her of so many a time, as she nestled to his heart by that dear bygone fireside in the London slum, with Uncle Bob ending the day in a drunken drowse, and Aunt Stingy adding a chapter to her long chronicle of her world's depravity and her own merits, she made no effort towards movement—just lay still unexplained, and watched the flood coming nearer, ever nearer, to a grand sand-castle just below ; and listened to the music of its ripples, and wondered at the builders' exultation over the coming cataclysm, the wreck of their morning's work. It seemed illogical, that shout of joy when a larger wavelet than its fellows glanced ahead of them, and catching sight of the majestic structure, rushed emulously on to be the first to undermine it. But not illogical neither, to be proud of the gallant stand that castle made against the seas ; a miniature Atlantis dying game, protesting to the last ! Nor when the final effort of the British Channel made of it mere oblivion—an evanescence in sand and foam and floating weed—to mingle a general concession towards going home to dinner now, with resolutions to come at sunrise, or thereabouts, and build a bigger one still to-morrow.

The Mandarin lady was conversing with a family when Lizarann opened her eyes, and all were looking towards the patient. But if what they said was overheard by her, it was not understood ; it was to the child only a part of the general goodwill the World seemed bent on showing towards herself.

"Very quick sometimes," said the lady, who couldn't have been really Chinese, or the family wouldn't have called her Miss Jane. Then the family's mamma, whose beauty seized on Lizarann so, almost, as to take her attention off the sand-castle, said, "Poor, darling little thing ! How sad !" And then the castle was overwhelmed, turrets, battlements, and flag ; and if Lizarann had heard that much, she certainly heard no more, and attached little meaning to that.

Besides, a very succulent little boy, who could not speak for himself yet, owing to his youth, who had been interpreted as anxious to show his prawn to the little girl, was

being urged by his nurse to that course, he having to all seeming suddenly wavered, and resolved to conceal the prawn—who was lukewarm and unhappy from being held too tight—in a commodious crease under his chin. Lizarann's attention was at the moment divided between solicitude for the prawn's welfare and an affection for this little boy she could not conceal, in spite of his callous indifference to the lifelong habits of his prisoner.

And then the beach and its glories had passed away, and Lizarann was aware that she had been carried indoors from a donkey-carriage she had accompanied other patients home in, and was lying down indisposed for food she recognised as nice; but trying to eat it too, to oblige Miss Jane, the Mandarin, who seemed to have taken a great fancy to her. Only she couldn't the least account for *why* it should be such an effort to eat her dinner; and ended by putting it down to the absence of her Daddy, and wanting sorely to be back with him at Mrs. Fox's; or—strange preference!—bringing him home from Bladen Street an intact Daddy as of old, albeit eyeless by hypothesis, and all the dreadful accident a dream.

There were reservations, though, to the way she let her heart go back to those sweet stethoscopeless days. To make none would have been disloyal to Teacher and to Mr. Yorick—oh yes!—and to Phoebe and Joan, and Mrs. Fox, and even to Aunt Bessy, though the latter was not a really well-informed person, and Dr. Spiderophel, who was more sinned against than sinning, the victim of a fraudulent black pipe! If she were still the little pilot of her eyeless Daddy through the crowded streets, what would she now be to Teacher, who had got to be a sort of mother to her?—what but one of a swarm of little girls in time, or otherwise, for religious instruction at a quarter-to-nine, and breaking loose in possession of two hours' more secular information at twelve, except Saturday? What but an unknown unit of a crowded slum to Mr. Yorick? Just think!—if there were no Mr. Yorick...

"I think we may put it down to the fatigue of the journey yesterday. You'll back me up in that, doctor?"

But the head physician of the Convalescent Home, who answered Miss Jane, the Mandarin, wasn't a firmly out-

lined character. "I see no objection to that," he answered. "But there's very strong feebleness—very strong feebleness! Shouldn't say too much about anything."

"I see," said Miss Jane. And that was all she said. But Lizarann, who heard more than she was supposed to hear, this time, formed a very low opinion of her new medical adviser. As if she had anything the matter with her! She had a better opinion of Miss Jane; and when that lady asked her, referring to a letter she wrote that afternoon to Adeline Fossett—who was a friend of hers, it seemed—what message she was to give on Lizarann's behalf, the patient had no misgiving about entrusting a full cargo of loves and kisses for delivery to her.

As she lay and listened in a half-dream in the sunny room, with the air coming in from the sea, to its distant murmur mixing with the drone of those untiring flies on the ceiling, and the scratching of Miss Jane's pen near at hand, the recent arrival at the Home had no suspicion how serious a report of her case that lady was framing. She lay and wondered when that long letter would come to an end, and looked forward to the sweet experience of rejoining her Daddy, and talking more to him about the sea he had known so well in the days when there was no Lizarann. *She* knew it now too; and was going to know it better still to-morrow.

"We shall have to make up our minds, Bess," said Athelstan Taylor two or three days later to his sister-in-law, at Royd.

"To . . . ?" said Miss Caldecott, in brief interrogation.

"We shall have to make up our minds what to say to Jim Coupland. You see what Addie thinks!"

Aunt Bessy saw, she said. But after reflection hit upon an escape from painful inferences. Didn't Addie sometimes look on the worst side of things? "Perhaps she does," said the Rector, and felt more cheerful over it. Then he got sundry letters from his pocket, and re-read them. His little access of cheerfulness seemed chilled by the reading, for when he had ended he shook his head, in his own confidence, and sighed as he refolded the letters.

"Let me look at them again," said Miss Caldecott. Both



knew the contents of these letters perfectly, and each knew the other knew them. But it looked like weighing them in a more accurate pair of scales than the last, every time of reading.

"Make anything of them?" the Rector asked, but got no answer. The letters were being read slowly. Justice was being done to the question.

But the truth was Aunt Bessy was suppressing her inspirations because she couldn't trust her voice with them. She was a dry and correct lady, but affectionate for all that; and it was her affection for Lizarann that had got in her throat, and would have to subside before she could screw herself up to pooh-poohing the letter Miss Jane the Chinese had written to Adeline Fossett, with such a bad account of her patient. This was the letter we left Lizarann listening to, as she lay looking forward to the sea, next day.

Presently the answer came, following on a short cough or two connected with the throat-symptom:—"I do think people of that sort are often very inconsiderate. Don't you?"

"Which sort?"

"People who are constantly in contact with this kind of thing—matrons of hospitals—nurses—all that sort! However, you know best."

"Miss Fanshawe's a very old friend of Addie's, and tells her the truth perhaps more freely because of her own experience—knows about Gus, and remembers Cecilia." The name of the Chinese, then, was Fanshawe. Cecilia was the sister that died.

"Perhaps," said Miss Caldecott. "Isn't the post very late?"

The post was audible without, with a powerful provincial accent. After debate—which accounted for the post's lateness—its boots departed down the garden gravel-path, and Rachel brought in the letters, and said, "Shall I shut up, miss?" as Pandora's box might have said, if willing to oblige.

The Rector was keen on one letter; the others might wait. Miss Caldecott said, "Addie, I see," and waited also to read her own letters. Then the usual course was followed in such cases. The Rector read, and said, "All right! Directly," and, "Just half-a-second!" in response

to, "Well!" which came at intervals, like minute-guns with notes of interrogation after them. Then expansive relief followed in his voice. "Oh yes!—that's very satisfactory. Now I shall be able to tell Jim." Then he surrendered one letter and read the other, saying as he neared the end, "Ah well!—it's *substantially* the same. I'm so glad we got them to-night."

"I thought it was that," said Miss Caldecott. "Naturally, people who see so many cases of this sort get frightened at every little thing." She read the letter aloud, making selections: "'Was up and walked about on the beach this morning.' You see, Athel! 'Sea air very often has that effect at first'—oh, that's what Addie herself says—'expect the Vim Æthericum will do wonders.' Some new medicine, I suppose. What does Miss Fanshawe's own letter say?"

"Only what Addie repeats. But I don't quite like..."

"What?"

"You'll see at the end there. 'Must be thankful she suffers so little!'"

"Oh, Athel! Now you *are* begging and borrowing troubles."

"Well—I didn't like the wording of it. However, I think I shall be justified in not reading that bit to her father. Poor Jim!"

This was in July, a fortnight or thereabouts before Challis paid his visit to the Rectory. It is a good sample of the sort of thing that had gone on in the interim. The sort of thing only very young or very lucky folk are unfamiliar with—the bulletin-foundry's intense anxiety to make the most of every little scrap of nourishment for Hope, on the one hand; on the other, the amazing capacity of Hope for growing quite bloated on starvation diet.

All the news that reached Jim about his dying child—the words give the truth, brutally; but what does the story gain by flinching from them?—was what a succession of kind hearts had tried to make the best of, each without a particle of conscious wish to falsify or suppress. What wonder that when Challis saw him at the well that day, Jim was using the mere letter of the daily tidings he received to silence the misgivings that were whispering to

his heart ? But they were there for all that, making deadly forecasts in his mind of a life he would have to live, he knew not how—a life that was darkness now, but still had a light shining in that darkness that it heeded—a light that helped oblivion of the cruel past. What would be left for him if that solace were withdrawn ?

He had always an undercurrent of suspicion that the evil was being made the best of, for his sake. And in the greatness of his heart—for Jim had a great heart—he felt pity for those who had to be the bearers of ill news ; none of them cut out for indifference to the suffering of its hearers. If he lost his little lass, the Master—so he still called Athelstan Taylor—would have to come and tell him ; and Jim would have been glad he should be spared the pain, after so much kindness to himself and the lassie. Only, that pain would not be outside the range of pity ; a practicable human pain that could be thought of and dealt with—not a pain like his own if the lassie followed her mother. Or rather, that last pain would be no pain at all ; merely the dumb extinction of a soul. Or would it be like the anæsthetic that multiplies suffering tenfold, and leaves its victim inexpressive—just mere adamant. So much the better ! Death would come the sooner.

But all the information Jim received was softened down, and he knew it. A murmur he could not have found voice to speak aloud was always in the inmost chambers of his mind, prompting doubt of the reports that reached him. But he never showed a sign of his growing consciousness of the gathering cloud, unless it were that he listened to his news, as he got it, more and more in silence.

“ How would he be the better if we did send him ? ” said Athelstan Taylor to his sister-in-law, less than three weeks later. “ He might just arrive to find her dying. How would he know his little lass ? Not ‘ by the feel ’ now ! Addie says she’s gone to a mere shadow. Not by the voice. . . . ” His own broke, and he stopped. Aunt Bessy sobbed in a window-recess, and thought she dried her tears unnoticed.

They had been walking to and fro and about the room in restless perturbation, she interlacing the uneasy fingers of

hands that wandered to her brows when free, then interlaced again; he somewhat firmer, but with lips not quite within control. He held the yellow paper of a telegram to hand an hour since, and kept re-reading the twenty-odd words that made it up, failing always to read any new and better meaning into the heart of their brevity. It had come enclosed in a letter from Adeline Fossett, who had the day previously been wired for suddenly by Miss Jane, the Chinese lady at Chalk Cliff. A short and grisly summons she knew the meaning of at once, following as it did on a forewarning letter thirty-six hours ago—a letter that teemed with excruciating assurance that there was no “immediate danger,” but that when there was the writer would send a telegram at once. She had kept her word.

That letter, forwarded promptly on to the Rectory, had made heart-sick discussion between Athelstan Taylor and Aunt Bessy since its arrival by this morning's post. What ought to be said?—what *could* be said to the father of the dying child, who was now looking forward to her near return home, building still whatever structures of hope the hesitating, irresolute tidings of a month past had left a weak foundation for? Who was to say to Jim that the time had come to give up that sweet vision he to this hour was trying hard to cherish, of a miraculous late summer and his little lass again, beside him at the well-head, in the sunshine? Who was to shatter the thin crust of artificial hopes that still kept under the fires of his misgivings, and leave them free to break loose through the crater of a volcano of despair?

“How would he be the better?” the Rector asked again presently. “And if I say to him now, ‘Lizarann is dying, but you cannot be beside her when she dies’—why—will not that be quite the worst thing of all? I can only judge by imagining myself in his position. Poor Jim!”

“You must do as you think best, Athel dear,” said Aunt Bessy. She was not a tower of strength in a crisis, this good lady; but she wouldn't hinder, though she couldn't help. Only, there are ways and ways of not hindering. Her brother-in-law would have liked another sample, this time one with less flavour of protest.

“Just look at it this way, Bessy,” said he. “If I could

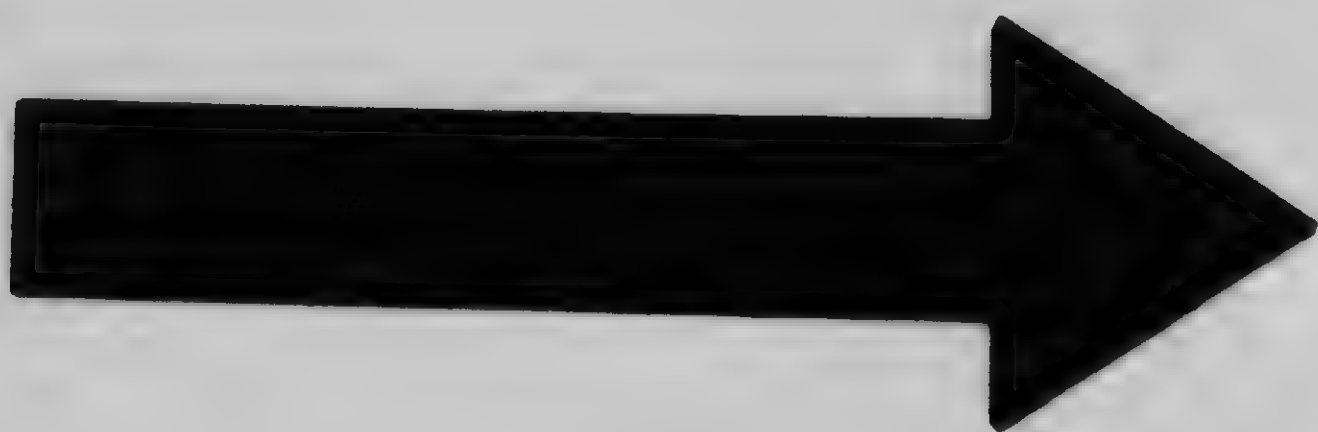
say to Jim, 'The doctors are sending bad accounts of the little one, and you must come with me straight away to see how things are going'—well!—that would be quite another thing. But to prepare him for bad news, and the rest of it, and then leave him alone in the cottage . . . !"

"He will be alone in the cottage. I had forgotten that. But it won't be so soon . . . surely . . . !" The hushed voice shows what is referred to—the "arch-fear in a terrible form" on whose face Europe at least cannot bear to look. How rarely does even the bravest among us speak of the grim terror by name, with reference to a particular case! What does it matter? Ways of saying the same thing are provided by conventions that seem quite alive to the whereabouts of the sting of Death, of the victory of the Grave. If the language of the daily press is any evidence on the subject, the Immortalism of the Creeds is only skin-deep. Disorders terminate fatally; folk breathe their last; they share the common lot; they succumb; none is so old and weary with the storms of Fate that the vernacular forecast of his release will not "anticipate the worst." But nobody *dies*, except paupers, in contemporary speech. Did you ever hear of a disorder "terminating fatally" in a workhouse? Or perhaps insolvents die—was one ever known to succumb?

Aunt Bessy was flinching before the inexorable, and pleading for useless respite. "I know what it means," said the Rector, "when telegrams like this begin. The old story!" He put the point aside with a sigh. "Ah well!—anyhow, Jim may be alone for some days. It isn't even as if I could be with him now and again. I *must* go to this Memorial business at Chipping Chester, and I can't get off stopping to marry Audrey: she would never forgive me." He enumerated other engagements—things that would keep him absent a week—even longer. They were matters quite outside the story.

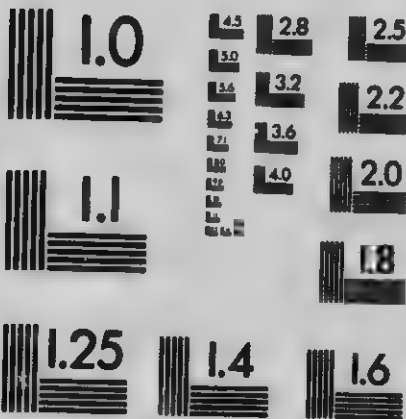
"When do you suppose old Margy will be back?"

"How can I tell? When do you suppose her niece's baby intends to be born?"



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## CHAPTER XLVII

So it had come about that for weeks past news of Lizarann, that none could doubt the meaning of, came to the Rectory, and that all of it that passed on to her Daddy reached him corrected out of all knowledge—the sting withdrawn.

Had he been able to read the letters that contained it himself, this would not have been possible. Some may have a stone ready to cast at Athelstan Taylor for this. The story has none. It was a question with the Rector of allowing poor Jim a few more days of false hope in order that he himself might be beside him in the first of his despair. His own easiest course, far and away, would have been to read Adeline Fossett's last letter to the poor fellow aloud, say, "God's will be done!" and so forth, and get away to Chipping Chester. But he had it in his mind to go to Jim when the use of the knife became inevitable, and remain with him, if Mrs. Fox were still away, at least until the day of her return. He shrank from leaving him alone in the cottage, a tortured soul in a sunless universe, within reach of a razor.

Had he conceived for one moment what the speed of events would be, his course might have been different. But the letters that he could not read aloud to Jim were misleading on one point. The writer caught constantly at the only easement words could be found for, that the actual hour or day, or even week, of Death could not be forecast. The dear little thing was not actually *dying*; she might live for weeks, even months. But the doctor here—said Miss Jane Fanshawe—who really had had immense experience, thought the case could only end one way. Still, the temperature was half a degree lower to-day, and we thought the air was beginning to tell. We should be able to see better when she was got back home, with her old surroundings. She fretted a good deal about her



Daddy. That was the general tone of the penultimate letter. Then came the one Miss Fossett enclosed on with the telegram which followed it. It came too late for the Rector to modify his plan of operations.

So Jim lived on by himself, and thought of his little lass, counting the days to her return. He spoke with no one, water-customers apart, except a neighbour who had undertaken to see to his needs in Mrs. Fox's absence. His dog was under the impression that it was *he* that was doing this, and there can be no doubt that he actually did conduct his master to and from the well. But nobody, except his canine self, believed that he had any share in cooking the dinner or making the beds.

Each long day that went by was a day nearer to the blind man's hearing of his child's voice. It would come, and would be hers once more—many times more than once. His reason might whisper to him of one end, and one alone, in some vague terrible future, to this insidious plague that had stolen on him like a thief in the night, to rob him of his happiness—the one jewel his darkness and his crippled limbs had left him. But that the hour was at hand, and the word spoken, that the light in his heart should be utterly quenched, and leave his soul to a darkness blacker than the void his eyesight had become—this was an idea it was not in him to receive, a thought that nature rose against.

No!—her return would be very soon now, and he knew how it would come. He had nothing to guide him to the day or the hour beyond his knowledge of the term first fixed—six weeks from the day of her departure. But he knew what would be his first hearing of it. She would call out to him—he was sure of that—the signal he had taught her to greet him with, in the old days of Bladen Street; the word he had listened for so many a time as he felt his way, touching with his stick the long blank wall he had to pass before he could feel her little hand in his. He dreamed and dwelt upon the moment when he should hear that call again, "Pi-lot!"

The villagers coming to the well for water were a great solace to him; a mine of robust hopefulness in which the choke-damp of misgiving was unknown. Often when Jim was downhearted about the little lass—had got a hump

about her, as he phrased it—some village matron's voice would come to him like a breath of fresh air. "Yow'll be having yower little maid back again vairy soon now, Master Coupland!" And the sympathetic confidence bred in Jim's own voice would help him to a conviction that was well-grounded, as he answered, "Aye, mistress, su. . . But a very little time to run now!" Even when the slight insecurity implied in the addendum, "Please God!"—making the little lass's return conditional on anything—weakened the robust language of unqualified Hope, Jim received it as a mere concession to the prejudices of Society. Besides, he and his Maker were on better terms now, since his initiation into church-music.

No note of alarm had reached the villagers; in fact, the Rector and his sister-in-law kept their information to themselves. Even Phoebe and Joan, when they paid Jim visits of consolation—every other day or thereabouts—were a reassuring element; though so near sources of better, or worse, information. They—poor little souls!—knew nothing of death close at hand, though alive to funerals, somewhat as a counsel's children might be alive to lawsuits.

It was near the close of a cloudless day in the fourth week of that August that Jim, undisturbed by applicants for water, was enjoying his last pipe before starting for home. He was not alone. One of the very old men one knows so well in every village was with him; a survival of the past who will tell you tales of your grandfathers, and end them up with some memory of a grandchild of his own, then living. Death is keeping them in mind, be sure!—will not forget them in the end, even though they may tax his recollection for another decade. This one could remember his childhood better than the events of yesterday, and though he could tell but little of it, was not quite without a record of Waterloo. For he could recall how his father held him up, a child of five, to see the blaze on Crumwen Beacon yander, when they loighted up fires all round about for the news that had come of the great battle across the water. But as for Nelson and Trafalgar, inquired about keenly by Jim, as pages from the same book, he could say nothing of them; they were a fower his time.

But he minded when they painted up the sign of the Lord Nelson on the roo-ad to th' Castle, with an empty sleeve to his ow-at; and the painter of un didn't know his trade, and put stoof with th' payunt to ma'ak it show up gay, and look at un now!

"It's a tidy bit o' time too, Master David," said Jim. "Many a year afore ever I was heard tell of."

"Aye well—that's so! But you'll be quite a yoong ma'an, coo-unting by years. Why, I lay you'll be yoonger by many a year than Peter Fox's widow—she that's gone to her sister in Loon'un."

"My old mother at the cottage? Ah, she'll be my age twice told, and a spell thrown in."

"Aye—aye! She's getting on, forward, now you ne'am it. But I mind her when she first came to these parts—just a yoong wench, not long wed—more by token my power missus lay dying at the time. . . . Noa!—I'd been marrud woonce aflower then—marrud to Sarah Tracey—you may ree-ad her ne'am on the sto'an in the graveyard. But for Peter Fox's widow, she was a coomly yoong wench, shooerly!"

He wandered among domestic events, until the dog, feeling he was being taken too little notice of, remonstrated. The substance of his communication, interpreted by Jim, was that it was time to be getting back home. On the road, his opinion was they were going too slow, and he endeavoured to drag his master at a trot. Old David commented on the restlessness of youth.

"But you won't be needing th' yoong poop soon, Master Coupland. That little maid of yowern she'll be coomin' ba-ack, I lay, none so many days ahead."

Here was a chance for Jim to reassure himself.

"For all I could say," said he, "the lassie may be up at the Rectory now. She'd come with her lady, as I make it out; just for the first go off, seeing the old mother's not handy for to nurse her up. Not that there'd be the need for it, to my judgment. These here doctor's stories . . ."

The old man interrupted him, stopping in the road to speak, with an uplifted impressive finger. "Do'ant ye hearken to none o' they, Master Coupland. They be a

main too clever, that they be! Why, I'm not the only ma'an with a tale to tell about they doctors!"

"What might your tale be, Master David?"

"My tale? Now I only say this to ye, Master Coupland. Just ye look at me. . . . Aye—be sure!—I should ha' said, feel hold of my arm. . . . There now!—where do ye find th' hospital pa'tient in that? Towedn o' ninety-nine year, last Whitsuntide! What'll your doctors ma'ak of that?"

"Won't they give you a clean bill, Master David?"

"Couldn't roightly say, Master Coupland, without consoltin' of 'em. And I can tell ye this much, they'll have to make shift without me; you may tell 'em so! Now, you hearken to me, not to they." The voice of the old boy, so nearly a centenarian, rose quite to vigour as he worked up his indignation against leechcraft. "That little maid of yowern, she has a bit o' cough o' nights?"

"Aye, aye!—a fair sort of a cough—comes and goes by the season."

"Ah!—and I lay, now and again o' nights, she'll sweat like to sop a flannel shirt through, like a sponge?"

"And that's true, too!"

"And happen she's thinned doon a bit?—happen she hasn't. . . .?"

"To the touch o' my hand, belike! But I'm an on-sartain judge—and that's the truth."

"Now I'm telling ye this." The old man stood still to make his tale the more impressive, his thousand wrinkles and his few grey hairs all fraught with emphasis that was lost on his hearer; though the sight of them in the after-glow might have held a passer-by, and made him listen. He repeated: "I'm tellin' ye this, Master Coupland. If ye could have handled me when I was a yoong lad of mebbe fowerteen year, or fifteen, you would just have felt through to th' boans. And the cough, night and mowerning—my word! You might well ha' thowt yower little maiden's just a gay trifle. . . . What said th' doctor?" The old man laughed scornfully, if toothlessly. "Said to my moo-ther she might let the oo' rta'aker measure me for my coffin. And she was that simple she took his word for it, and vairy nigh did. . . . ah!—you may be laughin'—but

vairy nigh she did! And there was I the while, just turned off my food and drink for a spell! Groo-wun I was, I ta'ak it. And to hear doctor cha'atterin, cha-atterin'! Such a maze o' wo'ords, it passes thinkin' where he could have gotten so ma-any. Ha—ha—ho!" And the old man resumed his walk with, "Eighty-fower year agone, Master Coupland, and me here, hale and hearty, to tell the tale!"

And no doubt a good deal of the tale was true, and the good-will of its narrator past all question. But he was making the most of it for the sake of the pleasure it gave him to cheer up the blind man's loneliness, without thinking quite enough of his responsibility to truth. When he wished Master Coupland sound sleep and pleasant dreams at the gate of the little cottage, and went slowly on to his own home in the village, he was saying good-bye to a man only too ready to give the rein to the horses of the chariot of Hope, even without an excuse. And here he had one, surely.

So, through his lonely supper—for, granting it cooked and placed on the table, Jim had a marvellous faculty of shifting for himself—he was building a sweet castle in the air with the materials so good-naturedly placed at his disposal. He imagined to himself as a thing to be to-morrow, if it had not already come to pass to-day, a journey home of a reinstated Lizarann, all eagerness for her Daddy. Not an exorbitantly robust little lass—he would not be unreasonable—but one perceptibly better than the one that left him a month since; whose kisses he could still feel, was soon to feel again. As he lighted his pipe in the garden with a vesuvian—for he never lit it in the house when alone, for safety's sake—and sat smoking under the stars in the clematis arbour, now beginning to lose its glory, it glowed in unison with the fire of a stimulated hope the old man's tale had kindled. If old David had been worse off eighty-four years ago than Lizarann, why should not the child have many a long year of life before her—aye!—even after he, Jim, had borne the last of his troubles, and was laid beside Dolly in the grave. Short of that, why should not he at least treasure the hope of the month to come, with Lizarann herself beside him in the warmth of that late summer the gentleman had all but guaranteed?

For this castle in Spain owed a great deal of its vividness to Challis's obliging meteorology. He had vouched for "St. Augustin's Summer," and it sounded well.

Then a painful thought came to him. It had fretted him before this, at intervals. How if that grave where Dolly lay could not be found? What did he know about it? Little enough! Priscilla knew; she had arranged all that—as Jim, for all his good-nature, suspected—with a certain ghoulish joy. But suppose, when he himself came to an end, Lizarann wished to place as much as was left of him beside her mother, where was the Lizarann of that day to find her? Well!—he could do nothing about it now. He would speak to the master, and make a clear chart, for the lassie's sake. No question came in here of how *he* might be the survivor, and have to place *her* in her mother's grave. Old David's tale had been an opiate to thoughts like that, and his heart rested on it.

Oh yes!—Lizarann was due, to-morrow or next day at furthest. She would tell him about the sea. He could bear to hear of it from her—his lassie who had seen it—though he had fought shy of actually hearing what he could never see again himself.

He was so happy in his dwelling on her near return, and the glamour he had clothed it with, that he could smoke there beneath the starlight he could not see, and think of his old nights on shipboard without a pang. Little things came back to him, long forgotten; one particularly, slight enough in itself, but so unlike Tallack Street and the spurious match trade! A wandering ice-floe from the Antarctic Circle, as the ship passed the Falkland Islands; and upon it, clear in the light of a great golden moonrise, a huge white she-bear with one young cub. They were drifting northward—ever northward—to the heat, and the seeming firm ground beneath their feet would melt quicker and quicker each day, to fail them altogether in the end, and leave them to die hard—the strong swimmers—in the deadly warmth of some tropic sea. Jim wondered at the thoughtlessness of his young day of brute courage and heedless energy, and how he never had a thought *then* for the mother-bear and her despair of saving her child in that plain of immeasurable waters; while *now*, for some

unexplained reason, it was quite a discomfort to him to think of it, there in old Margy's arbour under the clematis. But presently he suspected a reason why he felt a new feeling over it. How if his hold over his child, his precious possession, was melting—melting away? He brushed the intolerable thought aside. Could he not feel for the poor soul on the iceberg, bear though she was, without that? Oh yes!—Lizarann would come to-morrow.

All this trouble, and doctoring, and the like, makes a man raw, thought poor Jim to himself, seeking for apologies for his failure to attain a Spartan ideal. 'Tain't like then-a-days, when you might be in a high sea any hour of the day or night, and be whistled up to take in sail—as he was, to be sure, out of a dream about Dolly, that very time he saw the Flying Dutchman, and lost his sight the week after. . . . There now!—where was the use of going back on by-gones, when Lizarann would be here to-morrow, to hear him tell again about the Dutchman, with all her added knowledge of the sea to help.

But it was true, for all that, that a man got soft with nothing to rouse him up like, and keep him off of nursing up his old grievances, with ne'er a soul nigh to throw a word to. Jim never felt any too sure, neither, that his new cult of music was not an enervating luxury. Undermining musical phrases crept into his practice as a chorister that made him no better—mind you!—than a cry-baby. There was one in particular that was almost cruel to him in its beauty—it was as a matter of fact an adaptation by the Rector of that Ave Maria of Arkadelt that you know as well as we do—and he sang it aloud to the night-wind stirring in the trees, and the owls, for by now night was over all, in a kind of bravado, to show that he could bear it. But his voice broke on the last cadence, do what he might. "There, ye see!—just come of being so lonesome!" Jim spoke aloud to the darkness and the owls, to feel his solitude less if it might be.

But what did it matter when his lassie was coming to-morrow—coming to-morrow!

How the time was passing! There went the cottage clock again the third time since Jim lighted his first pipe after supper. Surely he must be mistaken!—it would stop

on the stroke of ten. He counted the deliberate strokes, each with its long preliminary warning; and on the eleventh said to himself that he must have counted wrong. Could he possibly be within an hour of the day that was to bring him Lizarann? Listen for the church-clock of the village, and make sure! He could hear his own heart beating in the stillness, even through the monotone of a cricket somewhere close at hand. Old Margy's clock was a bit fast always....

There!—sure enough this time, the first stroke on the wind. Jim counted steadily to the tenth, and all but made quite certain he had heard the last, so long did the pause seem to his anxiety, when yet another came. No mistake this time. Eleven! Bed-time.

Was it true? One hour more, and he might be asleep, to wake up to the day that would bring him back the thing that was dearer to him than the light no day would ever bring again. Only an hour!

His little dog, sharper of hearing even than he, caught a coming sound afar, and started up in sudden indignation, dog-wise, that something, somewhere, was presuming to exist without consulting him! Whatever it was, Jim thought a restraining finger in his collar a good precautionary measure; with a slight admonition that a smothered growl, for the present, would meet all the needs of the case. It continued to express, under protest, a deep, heart-felt resentment as of a wrong too great to be endured, and still Jim could not spot the cause. At last a motor horn, somewhere, perhaps, on the far side of the village two miles away, say!

Loud and faint, by turns, through the village; then clearer on the open road, and then the noise of wheels at great speed. The little dog, probably catching the blinding glare of the lamps, lost all self-control at those two great unheard-of wrongs to his kind, and gave way to his feelings without reserve. Then a rush and a dust-cloud, left to do its worst, at leisure, to the lungs of man and cattle and plants, and a stench to poison the sweet air of Heaven. And then a couple of folk had been carried, quicker than need was, from Thanes Castle to Royd Hall, with the execrations of a small population behind them.



Jim was too happy at heart to curse even a motor-car. Besides, he remembered how once this very car had given his little lass a ride. He owed it a benediction rather. He felt his way to his couch, and had got his wooden leg off, and found his pillow, before the reek of petrol had died away, and was asleep almost as soon as the little dog beside him. Was it his last sleep there before he should hear his little lassie's voice again?

The gas was turned down low, almost to extinction, in the ward of the Chalk Cliff Nursing Home, where Adeline Fossett was preparing to pass the night beside her little invalid's bed. There was no other patient in the room. Miss Jane, looking worn and sad, was just saying good-night, with a small hand-lamp in her hand, whose green shade was no help to the pallor of either lady. Both knew what was pending; neither knew how soon.

"Ring if you have the least doubt about it, dear," said Miss Fanshawe. "But my own impression is this will go on a day or two longer. I can't say, but I think if there's a change you'll see it."

"I won't scruple to call you. But I suppose there's nothing to be done that I can't do?"

"Nothing at all. No one can do anything now. Good-night, Adeline!" As she opened the door to go, a muffled clock outside struck midnight. "It's twenty minutes past," said she, as she closed the door. Then, as Miss Fossett sat in the half-darkness in the large chair by the bedside, she could hear two sounds—the interrupted breathing of the little patient on the bed, and the rapid, irritating ticking of her own watch, laid by chance on something resonant. It would become maddening, she knew, in the growth of the stillness, as the night took its hold upon her; so presently she rose and quenched it. Then, being up, she went to the window, just open for ventilation, and feeling the soft air, warm for late August, opened it gently to its width, and leaned out. The voice of the water was a bare murmur now, away off over half a league of sand; and the wind must have changed, for the bells of a church a mile inland were striking twelve at leisure, and were clear through the silence; till, a railway-

yell cutting them off at the tenth stroke, they wavered, lost heart, and died. These were sounds new to the day at Chalk Cliff, bathed for forty-eight hours in a south-west wind, off the sea.

"What did you say, darling?" She closed the window gently, and went back to the bed, to hear. . . . "Why can't you hear the waves? Is that it? Because the tide's going out. Because it's gone out as far as it can go."

"Can't it go no furver?" asks the voice from the pillow, through a breath that goes heavily.

"Not to-day. Next time it goes out it will—at least, I think so." The speaker was not sure on the point, but she had caught sight of a three-quarter moon, and that would do to quote in case of catechism. She turned on the light slightly, to talk by; then sat by the bed again. But Lizarann's days of scientific enquiry are over. She listens for the sea though, because her Daddy once went sea-voyages, still.

"Mustn't I be took to my Daddy in free dyes, by the rilewye?" The sound of the railway-whistle through the window has helped to this.

"Yes, darling; in three or four days you shall go to Daddy. There's a big grape with the skin off for you to suck. Such a big one! Try if you like it."

Lizarann gives her old nod, with the grape in her mouth. She is refusing other diet now, and it was clear two days since that nourishing food and stimulants had been given every chance and failed. She is to be allowed to die in peace, being in good hands.

"I do love you, Teacher, very, very much!"

"So do I, darling. . . . There are no pips to spit out, because I took them all out. Another? . . . No?—very well, dear; then I won't bother you. . . . The counterpane?—it's too heavy? Very well, dear, we'll have it off. . . . so!"

Which of us, over five-and-twenty, has the luck to be still a stranger to the penultimate restlessness of coming Death—to the hands that will still be weakly seeking for God knows what!—the speech that cannot frame some want its would-be speaker may be helpless to define, but will not give up attempting? Lizarann is nearing that

stage fast—faster than Adeline Fossett thought when Miss Jane left her but now.

But her mind is quite clear still on the great main point of her small life. The words "Only Daddy most!" show the continuous current of her thought, coming as they do a long pause after her apostrophe to "Teacher."

"Of course Daddy most, darling child!" says the latter. "But Mr. Yorick very much too!"

The name arouses enthusiasm. "Oh, very, very much too!" But this is too great a tax on the poor little lungs, tubercle-gripped, and an attempt to follow with a schedule of loves deserved and granted fails, and quiet is imperative.

Adeline Fossett turned down the light again, and remained silent, listening to the heavy breathing, with its ugly little spasmodic jerk now and again. She was unhappy in her mind, over and above grief. Here was this little thing with only a few days at most to live—she was convinced of that—and utterly unconscious of her state. Was it right—was it fair—to leave her so? All the traditions of her religious cult from youth upward said no; according to them, the dying were to prepare, or be prepared, for death. But when the patient was simply slipping almost painlessly away—seeming at least to suffer only from an inexplicable feverish unrest, never from acute pain that could not be denied at will—what was to be gained by thrusting on a childish mind a demand to face the black contingency, to make a formal acknowledgment of the grave? Would it not be safe to give one little soul Godspeed into the Unknown, whose only care was now that each of her many loves should be known to their recipients, each in its right degree? Would not those very loves be at garments to shelter the new-born soul in the world beyond, whether the date of its arrival was now or hereafter? She was shocked at the venturesome impiety of the question she half-asked herself:—Could she not trust God for that? A happy inspiration hinted at a half-answer in the affirmative, and biassed her to silence.

Another anxiety, perhaps more pressing still, took the place of that one. Ought she not to have written more explicitly to the Rectory about the child's state? On her arrival, in answer to Miss Fanshawe's telegram, she had

found nothing to warrant prediction of the days, or even weeks, that the tension might be prolonged. All she could say with certainty was that Lizarann was at present quite unfit to be moved, but that it was impossible to foresee. We must wait on events. But she said never a word to set any hopes afoot. She had written almost daily; once in answer to a letter of Athelstan Taylor, telling how he might have to go away for a few days, and of his resolution of silence with respect to Jim. She was, at first, inclined to disapprove this course, but later saw that it was unavoidable, and wrote to that effect. Still, the idea of Jim in ignorance, nourishing hopes, perhaps, while his little lass lay there dying, was an excruciating one. She said to herself repeatedly that it was merely an idea; that the contemporaneousness of a death with far greater unconsciousness of its possibility than Jim's was an everyday occurrence. What would the wife, who now hears of her husband's death months ago, have gained by the knowledge of her widowhood, had the news come sooner? She pictured other instances to persuade the idea away. But it remained.

Miss Fanshawe, to whom this case was only one of a hundred, said to her, "If you could spirit the child's father down here to be with her when she dies, that would be another matter. But you say that's impossible. Why give him ups and downs of anxiety? Tell him what you like by way of preparation, but not till it's all over." Miss Fossett felt the truth of this view, but the position grated on her moral sense. However, she felt she must submit to the discomfort of a sense of untruth for awhile. It was not to last long.

She must have been dozing, and for longer than she could have believed possible, when she waked suddenly to reply to the child, who had spoken, with, "Yes—darling! What did you say?"

"Aren't you going to bed, Teacher?"

"Yes, dear, presently."

"'Tin't night?"

"Yes, it's night. But that doesn't matter. I shall go to bed presently."

"When shall you go to bed?" After a pause, this.

"Presently, when Miss Jane comes. She'll come very soon." Then, in response to something only audible to close listening, "No, darling, you're not to have the nasty medicine—only the nice one. It's not time yet for either. . . . Why mustn't you have no medicine? . . . Well, darling, you know we all have to take medicine when the doctor says so. . . ."

"Did the doctor said I was ill?"

"Yes, dear, the doctor said you were ill, and to stop in bed till you were quite well . . . what?"

"And then go home to my Daddy where Mrs. Forks is?"

"And then go home to your Daddy where Mrs. Fox is."

A phase of coughing comes upon this; alleviation is tried for with the nice medicine. But stimulants and sedatives have had their day in this case. Adeline Fossett is becoming alive to the fact. However, the nice medicine can still soothe a little; and in half an hour a lull comes, and a kind of sleep.

Then for the watcher another deadly doze, of jerks and nightmares. And then another waking to the sound of the little patient's voice, curiously full of life this time.

"When I'm took home to my Daddy, Teacher, where Mrs. Forks is . . ."

"Yes, dear!"

"Shall the children go on digging and spaddle in the water, just the same like now?"

"Yes, darling, just the same, till it's too cold. Then they'll go home and go to school."

"And fish for sprawns just the same?"

"Just the same."

"And when they've gone to school and no one's on the beach to see, will there be high water?"

"High water? Yes, of course, dear—every day, just the same as now . . . what?"

"And low water?"

"And low water too."

"Like when my Daddy went sea-viyages?"

"Like when your Daddy went sea-voyages." But this has been a long talk, and has gone slowly against obstacles of speech. So when Lizarann ends with a half-inaudible, "I sould tell my Daddy that," the torpor is returning,

and it may be she really sleeps, for all that the breathing is so difficult. She has persisted that she suffers no pain; so Miss Fossett tries for satisfaction on that score. But the fear is that having no pain may only mean that the pain eludes description. Still, there is room for hope, of a sort.

"I've heard many cases talk like that, quite brightly, just before," says Miss Jane, standing by the bed. She has come to relieve guard, and has heard her friend's report of her night's watching. Lizarann has not moved since she spoke last, an hour ago, and still lies in what may be sleep, breathing heavily. The jerks in the breathing do not wake her, strangely.

"She was almost chattering, one time," says Miss Fossett. "Poor little darling!"

"About her Daddy?"

"Yes, and about the high and low tides, and how he went sea-voyages."

"Fancy that! The little soul! But no delirium?"

"I think none. Just a little feverishness—in the half-waking. Not delirium."

"You go to bed now. I'll call you if there is anything."

"Promise to!" A nod satisfies the speaker, who goes away to lie down. As she looks out, from a window on her way, across a sea without a ripple, she understands why the tide was unheard. Even now, scarcely a sound! She pauses a little to look at the planet blazing above the offing, and its long path of light upon the water—wonders is it Venus or Jupiter?—and passes on to rest. How callous is the bed one lies down on in one's clothes, with something over one, to get a few hours' sleep! And how hard they are to get, sometimes!

Adeline Fossett had had over three hours when she waked with a start in response to a hand on her shoulder. "I should like you to come," said Miss Jane, who then returned at once.

Lizarann, or the shadow that had been she, was propped up with pillows on the bed when Miss Fossett followed her friend two minutes later. "Is that Teacher?" was what she seemed to say. But speech was very faint indeed.

"I don't think she sees you," said Miss Jane.

"Can you hear what I say, darling?" Yes, apparently; and knows it is Teacher who speaks. What is it we can get for her? For the feverish movement of the hands, and the constant effort to articulate, have all the usual effect of baffled speech, with much to say.

Miss Fanshawe's wider hospital experience makes her less receptive of the idea. She waited, silent, while Miss Fossett asked the question more than once, before any intelligible answer came.

Then speech came suddenly to Lizarann. She wanted to get up now, and go to her Daddy. Yes!—she would like to have her new flock on and go to her Daddy. Mustn't she go, Teacher? To which Teacher replied: "Yes, darling, you shall go, very soon. But it's night now, and Daddy's in bed."

"But I *shall* go?"

"Yes—indeed you shall! Very soon." Then Miss Fossett looked up at Miss Jane, who merely said, "Not very long now." But how strong the voice was for a moment! Yes—that would be so sometimes—sometimes even louder than that. Wasn't she speaking now?

Miss Fossett stooped to listen again. "I shall see my Daddy," is all she hears. Yes—Lizarann shall see her Daddy—it's a promise! What is that she's saying now? Be quiet and listen!

"When I see my Daddy—when I see my Daddy . . ."

"Yes—darling! What?"

"When I see my Daddy I shall call out, 'Poy-lot!'"

## CHAPTER XLVIII

ATHELSTAN TAYLOR and Aunt Bessy were at breakfast when the telegram came to say all was "over unexpectedly; writing." It was opened by the Rector, who rose and handed it to his sister-in-law; then passed on to the door in time to stop an incursion of Phoebe and Joan with "Aunty's coming directly, chicks. Run away now." But not in time to prevent Joan having good grounds for asking Phoebe why Aunt Bessy was crying.

Aunt Bessy was, no doubt. And the Rector was completely upset, too, for the moment. He had not the least expected anything so soon. But his work was cut out for him now. "I must go to poor Jim at once," he said.

"Oh, Athel, Athel!" said Aunt Bessy through her sobs. "You know, don't you, dear, that Jim would have been told before if I had had my way?" It was what Athelstan himself afterwards spoke of to Adeline Fossett as "poor Bessy's I-told-you-so consolation." The Rector was grieved for her grief, and knew that this expedient would really help her to bear it, so he was not going to grudge her all she could get from it.

"I know, Bess," said he. "Perhaps I was wrong. However, I didn't see quite what else to do. And I never imagined anything so sudden as this. Poor Jim!"

But it was only an easement, to be used and discarded. Miss Caldecott was ready to surrender the point—certainly wouldn't rub it in. "P-perhaps you *were* right, after all!" said she. Her grief for Lizarann was very real. And how was she to tell Phoebe and Joan?

"You may trust me to do whatever can be done for poor Jim, Bess. I shall go to him at the Well at once. He won't be absolutely unprepared by the time I tell him, because he knows my foot on the road a long way off, and he will know something has happened by my coming so



early. It's not half-past eight yet. I shall be with him soon after nine."

"Won't he think you're bringing her with you? She was to have come here first, you know. That was the arrangement."

"Oh no! He never used to expect her till he heard her call, 'Pilot.' You know?"

"Oh, I know! Poor little Lizarann!"

And all those weary hours of the watchers by the bedside of his dying child, Jim had slept sound, treasuring in the heart of his dreams the inheritance of that last lucky memory of overnight. Old David's tale of how he was condemned in boyhood, to live after all into his hundredth year, stayed by Jim as a pledge of a sure Lizarann in the days to come—a very sure one in that St. Augustin's summer that was all but due now. Jim had slept sound, and the story does not grudge him his sweet delusions. The heart- tonic of that false diagnosis of eighty years ago took a variety of dream-forms before the morning, but never lost its savour. By turns it would be a thing and an incident. Jim had hardly time to appreciate the draught of nectar it became, when it had changed, even as it touched his lips, to a triumphant arrival in a glorious port, after stormy seas, with a wreck in tow, called the Lizarann. Jim would fain have kept that dream, to see that wreck refitted ready for sea. But then of a sudden, the wreck was no wreck, but a tree, and Lizarann was up in the tree. And Jim was just thinking now that he would see what Lizarann was really like, without any wonderment why she was never visible before, when the tree changed its identity and became old David himself, or his story; Jim was not clear which. But through these dreams, and others, the interwoven warmth of joy was always the same—th' reinforced hope the old chap's yarn had left behind.

Nevertheless, when Jim woke he found it hard to remember where on 'arth he was; and didn't remember, at first. But he knew that when he did it would be nice. And so it was. It was old Margy's cottage, and Lizarann was coming back to it. Jim noticed that everything said so to him. A voluble hen, however anxious she was he should know

about her egg, made frequent reference to Lizarann's return. A blackbird conversed with a family of wrens about it, and a linnet endorsed their view, that Lizarann was certainly coming back. A herd of cows, going leisurely to pasture, lowed a great deal about it, and repeated to each other again and again, "Lizarann is coming back," as they died away in the distance musically. And Jim knew that, far afield, a thousand larks were all of a tale, above the shorn crops in the blue heaven, telling each other Lizarann was on the road—was coming back once more to her Daddy. His little dog especially was clear about it, but was also clear that it would never do to neglect official obligations, and dragged Jim to the well-head with all his wonted enthusiasm. He was perfectly competent to give due notice of her arrival, but business was business.

The essentials of Jim's breakfast, arranged overnight, scarcely brought him in contact with human converse, because the very little girl, who came with milk, and took ba'ack t'yooother joog, was so absorbed in her task as to be able to think of nothing else, and speechless. Besides, she had misgivings that the little dog wanted her blood, and made her visit as short as possible. But when Jim arrived at his well-head, he soon got a chance to speak of his hopes to a fellow-creature, although it was a young one—too young to talk the matter out with. It was not always easy to identify these youngsters, as they made no allowance for blindness; only nodding affirmatives when asked their names right. Jim had to impute wrong names, and provoke corrections.

"You're little Billy Lathrop, young man, I take it?"

"No-ah be-ant. Oy be Ma-atthew Ree-ad doon th' la-an—two dower off Iathrop's."

"I reckoned you might be. It's your brother Jack I've to thank for the loan of this young tyke. He'll be wanting to see him back. Suppose you was to tell him he may have him back to-morrow. Or next day at farthest. A smart young character like you can begin larnin' to carry messages."

"Oy'll tell un."

"Because Lizarann's coming back—that's what you've got to tell. *Who* is it's a-coming back, hey?"

"L'woyzara-ann."

"My little maid, d'ye see?"

"Yower little may-ud."

"That's a likely young customer. Now mind you tell your brother Jack just that and nothing else, Matthew Read." And Matthew Read departed with his pails, leaving Jim all the happier for having, as it were, substantialised and filled out his hopes by this little performance.

The pipe Jim lighted with a vesuvian after discharging a few more water-claims, now and then recurring to the subject nearest his heart with the more talkworthy claimants, was as happy a pipe as he had ever smoked. As the sun rose higher, a full-blooded southern Phoebus with no stint of heat in his veins, he could rejoice in the evident influence of this mysterious St. Augustin, of whom he had never heard before, but who clearly could make a summer for him and his little lass. It was coming, and so was she. She would not, maybe, be her old self for a bit. But, then, no more had old David been. And that was eighty-four years ago—over half a century before Jim was born! Any number of glorious expectations might entrench themselves behind such a precedent—making a fortress in his soul against Despair.

Who says tobacco cannot be enjoyed in the dark? Jim had heard that story, and thought to himself as he cleared his pipe of ashes that he could tell another tale. But what was that pipe to the pipes he would smoke when his little lass was back, to make all this caution in lighting them needless? It was as good as having eyes himself to have the child beside him. But suppose now he had been blind from birth! Think of what it would have been like to have never a tale to tell to his little lass! He had so lost himself in his love for the child that this little bit of optimism came spontaneously, without a shade of bitter comment about being thankful for small mercies.

It was curious to him now—admittedly so—that he had shrunk from hearing again the sound of the waves, seeing he was actually looking forward to hearing Lizarann tell of them. It was on one account a disappointment to him, that since she was taken away to Chalk Cliff the weather

had been so calm. It was true that the one letter she had written him—just at the time of that slight fluctuation upwards in the first week of her stay—had told of a rough sea, with such big waves; but then it had told also of how a pleasure-boat had been shoved off and a lady got wet through. Would that rough sea help him to tell her, better than before, what the waves were like when he was on that steamer in the China seas, and a typhoon swept the decks clear?

Talking was going on, down the road. Somebody was referring to the Rectory, speaking of it as the parsonage. Jim listened. Pa'arson had coom whoam yesterday. That was all right, but had no one else come to the Rectory? Yesterday was exactly six weeks and a day since Lizarann's departure. But Jim had hedged against despair with constant self-reminders that her not having come need mean nothing. So he could ask questions, equably.

"News of th' Master, belike, Jarge?" He affected great ease of speech—a chatty nonchalance—as he awaited the arrival of the voice he had recognised at the road-end of the avenue to his Well. He had stumped along it quick, though, for a wooden leg and a stick.

"Nowt amiss has gotten t' Maister," said the bee-tender, taking time. "Not for to reach *my* ears, this marn'n."

"Thought I heard some guess-chap give him his name, Jarge. Yonder along, a good cast down the road. Who might you have been talking to?"

"Po-ast."

"Ah!—and what said the Post?"

Jarge took more time, during which Jim urged him to fix his mind firmly on the Rector. Jarge had understood that the Rector had come home, and that the Post's son had just gone off to him with a telegram when the Post left home. This was as much as Jarge could be expected to know all at once, outside bee-craft; so Jim spared him further catechism. "Thank 'ee kindly, Jarge!" said he. "What o'clock might you make it?" Jarge made it a qwoo-aater to eigh-yut by th' soon, and Jim thanked him again, and stumped back to the well-head.

In his sanguine mood, he took a rose-coloured view of

that telegram. Lizarann and Teacher had not come back yet, but it heralded their coming. Why!—what else could it be, unless it was no consarn of his, anyhow? He lit another pipe, and gave himself to happy anticipations; for the influence of old David's early experience was strong on him. Being alone, he talked to his little dog, to whom he could speak freely; for with his keen hearing he could be sure he was alone, even if the young pup's quiescence had been no proof. It wouldn't be but a day, or two at most—so Jim told that pup—before Jack Read could reclaim his property; if, indeed, he hadn't got a better little tyke by now, as very like was the case; a superior article altogether, to whom Keating was unknown, and who especially never ran after chickens. However, it wouldn't do to make too sure, because maybe the little lass wouldn't, just yet awhile, be allowed out by the doctor on cold mornings, in which case things would have to remain as they were for a bit of time. But a day would come when little tykes would be superfluities, and Jack Read might have this one back, and see what he could do towards larning him better manners in the house. The object of these remarks misconceived the drift of them altogether, and, taking them for recognitions of his own merits, heaved a sigh over the shortcomings of other little dogs, and fell asleep in the sun.

Jim sat again alone and smoked, and listened to the growing sounds of the day, the insect life stirring in the sunshine, the birds that meant to sing the summer out; growing fewer now, but revived by St. Augustin, evidently. He could hear, at the interval of each new furrow, the team of horses in an old-world plough swing round; and the ploughman's voice, now near and clear, now at the far hedge of his field, and dim. Somewhere a long way off a threshing-machine was droning, and as the sound of it came and went, and rose and fell with the wind, Jim thought of his little lass; and how that one letter of hers old Margy had re-read to him so often had told how she had heard the sea sound so through the night, now more, now less. If she had not come back to the Rectory yesterday, as he hoped, was she up now and out on the beach? ... but no—hardly! It was barely eight o'clock. Yes—

there went the church-bells ! But he could not count the strokes for the noise some hedge-sparrows made suddenly, almost close to his ear.

That was a harvest cart with a many horses, Jim supposed, and every horse with bells. Going to load up, at a guess ; for it was soon gone by, and its bells a memory. Then another sound of wheels stole in, and grew. Not a cart ; carts rattle. Some sort of carriage, coming from Furnival Station. Not indigenous to this village ; Jim had learned every native wheel by heart. Not a very dashing carriage neither ! It went slow, and the horse seemed to think of every step. A hired fly from the station, of course ! Why didn't Jim spot that before ?

Now, suppose it had been eight in the evening, it might have been Teacher bringing Lizarann from the station. At this time in the morning ridiculous, of course ! Still, the thought was nice.

That fly had pulled up on the road, and not so far off. Jim could hear interchanges between the driver and his fare, evidently male and English. Did Jim know that voice ?

"All right—pull up here ! I'll get down and walk the rest of the way. How far is it ?"

"For to step it afut ! Twenty minutes, easy."

"Which does 'easy' mean ?"

"Easy for time, mister. You'll have to be a bit brisk to do it in twenty minutes. Give you twenty-three, to do it without idlin'."

A foot on the road, a coach-door that wouldn't hasp, a discovery that the driver has only one and elevenpence change for half-a-sovereign, and then the half-sovereign is on its way back to Furnival, and the fare has started on his twenty-three minutes' walk, with some of the change in his pocket. But he is not going to do it without idling, it seems.

Jim heard him approach the well-gap, and come to a stand. Then he turned up the brick pathway. Now, who was this chap going to be ?

"Well, Jim Coupland ! Where's Lizarann ? I've come to pay her a visit. And you too !"

Jim knew Challis again the moment he heard his voice close. "Aha !" he exclaimed joyfully. "You're the

gentleman. Came with the Master nigh a month ago!" And the cordiality of Blind Samson's big right hand was all the greater that it was welcoming, not only a friend, but what was in a sense the dawn of Lizarann. For this gentleman, whose name had slipped Jim's memory, would never have asked for her on insufficient grounds. In a flash of his mind, Jim had inferred that his visitor, on his way to the Rectory, had decided—from information received—that his lassie, due there the day before, would be, or might be, already with her father at the Abbey Well. A very reasonable view! It was almost an assurance that his child had arrived, that this gentleman should speak of her thus.

Challis left his hand in Jim's, while he said, "But where's the kid?"

Said Jim, with confidence, "If you'd come another half-hour later, I lay you'd have found her, back with her Daddy. Six mortal weeks she's been away. But you'll find her at the Master's, I take it, or meet on the road."

Challis's voice hung fire a little as he answered, "I'm not on my way to the Rectory now. I shall have to pay my respects to Miss Coupland later. Jolly glad she's back, though, Jim, for your sake! How's she coming on? All the better for the sea, I'll answer for it." Jim was not the one to be behindhand in optimism. "Done her a world o' good, I'm told! Only, ye see, I haven't set eyes on the Master this week past, and I have to put my dependence on the two little ladies, seeing the old mother at the cottage has gone to London."

At this point Jim saw his way to still further flattering his certainty of Lizarann's return by sending a message about her to his sister, so he let Aunt Stingy into the conversation provisionally. He worded a *couleur de rose* account of his invalid, subject to reserves, and asked Challis to be the bearer of it.

"What's that, Jim?... Ah, to be sure; I had forgotten that. Mrs. Steptoe's your sister. Yes—I'll tell her." His manner was unsettled, tense, *exalté*, but not that of a man preoccupied with any but pleasant thoughts. Jim felt that some enquiry after this relative of his would not be out of place. He hoped she was giving satisfaction

to "the mistress," and half suggested that her cooking was what he was asking about. His sureward hearing detected discomfort in Challis's reply: "Oh aye—yes! Very good wholesome cooking!" Had he touched a sore subject? He decided that he had, and was sorry when the gentleman said abruptly: "That's all right enough. Can't stop now! Got to get to the Park Gate by nine. How far do you make it out to the Park Gate?" Jim gave what information he had to give; but Challis remembered quite enough of the ground to know that the fly-driver's estimate was a low one; in fact, it had been the interest of the latter to minimise the distance, in order to get away as soon as he could. "I shall have to look alive," said Challis. He shook Jim's hand cordially, and started.

In the accident of passing words it had so chanced that if either of these two men had been asked—how came he to know that Lizarann had returned to the Rectory?—he would have referred to the other as an authority. Challis's confidence that he would find Lizarann at the Well was only the echo of some words of the Rector's three weeks previously, fixing the date of her return; while Jim's assurance that she was at the Rectory was based on Challis's way of taking her presence at the Well for granted. Certainly when they parted, each had an image in his mind of the invalid back again, much improved, and looking forward to her meeting with her Daddy.

Such serene unconsciousness of the truth as Jim's was at this moment strikes harshly on one's sense of probability; but, probable or no, it was actual. Jim had not experienced such happiness since his child left him to live, during her absence, on hopes of her return in renewed health. She was coming now; not a doubt of it! She was actually near at hand; so near that, with a guide, he could almost have walked the distance on his wooden leg. She was coming. . . .

Then a gust of disbelief that anything so good could be his, so soon, seized on his faculties, and made his judgment dizzy. He must be silent and patient, and wait.

But with this added assurance of Lizarann, pending or near at hand, Time got a quality of tediousness. The half-hour that followed on Challis's invasion seemed longer



than all the previous half-hours of the morning added together. Till then Jim had been making all allowance for the chance that Lizarann was not due till to-morrow, or even next day. The question was an open one. Challis had managed to leave behind him an implication that she had arrived. How the sluggish minutes would crawl now, till she came! Well—patience!

Why was the gentleman going to the Park, not the Rectory! Pending Lizarann, Jim thought it worth while to wonder at this; or, indeed, at any other trifle that would hold his mind for a moment, and help his patience. He had hardly noticed Challis's *distract* manner at the time, but it came back to him now. Yes—why was the gentleman not going to the Rectory? Of course, he was only known to him as a guest there; might have been a perfect stranger at the Hall, for anything that appeared to the contrary. But it was the way he had disclaimed the Rectory that clashed with Jim's slight knowledge of him. "Not on his way" there now! "However, it was no concern of Jim's, anyhow! Think of Lizarann again—only Lizarann!"

His mind ran back to the old match-selling days in Bladen Street. There was the terrible January night again, no darker than his day was now, for all he felt St. Augustin's sun on his hands and face; for all he knew at a guess how the white road would have glared on the eyes he had lost, even as his last memory of daylight blazed on them still, leagues away in Africa. There was he *gain*—a spot in the darkness that was his lot for ever; a something made of sick torture, borne in a litter; and then the voice of his little lass, and the touch of her lips as he lay. . . . Well!—at least he had a man's heart in him then, and, crushed as he was, made light of his agony, to spare her. That was a consolation to him now.

His lot for ever! His lot, that is, so long as he himself should live to bear it. His lot, till what was left of what was once a man was laid by what once was Dolly, in a grave! Then touch and hearing would be gone too, and he and Dolly alike forgotten in the black void of the time to come. . . . What did *he* matter? He flung the unconsidered unit, himself, aside, in view of a new terror that came

suddenly—an image of his little lass without her Daddy. That was too much pain to bear. To think of the lassie left alone!

But why think of it at all, yet awhile? Might not he see her again within the hour? Was it not a chance that even now she was on her way, coming—coming? . . .

What was that? A dog's bark he knew quite well—the Rector's dog—somewhere over by the Rifle Butts. Near a mile off—yes!—but clear to the sharpened hearing of a blind man. Equally clear to his dog too, asleep in the sun, and calling for prompt action. The little tyke started up, barking in reply, and scoured away to make his presence felt elsewhere. Jim's thought stopped, that he might listen for a distant step on the road, a step he knew well. A great swinging stride unlike any other man's in those parts—how mistake it? But another quarter of an hour must pass before either could have articulate speech of the other, mere shouting apart. Jim was just on the very verge of his release from suspense, and could not bear to wait a moment longer, patience or no! He started along the paved way that led to the road, guiding himself, as he could well do, by touching the curb with his stick. It was all plain sailing to him, so far, and no guide was needed.

He stood and listened, waiting for the approaching footsteps. He could hear his own little deserter's bark, no great distance down the road; and through it, at intervals, the bark of the other dog, coming slowly nearer. But otherwise, nothing outside the sum of noises he could know the day by from the night, a monotone with here and there a special sound of beast or bird or insect. Yes!—there was another sound, some way off still; the motor-car that had passed the cottage last night, coming from the Hall. Jim knew its special hoot of old; could have sworn to it among a dozen others.

An old turf-cutter was near enough to see Jim at this moment, and, after, told what he saw. This man was some way off, trimming the roadside turf; but his eyes were good, though he was deaf as any post.

He saw Jim—so his tale ran—standing where the path began, close against the road. He seemed to be listening for something. Quite unexpectedly he saw him throw up

his arms as though surprised or delighted ; but of this the old man, hearing nothing, could not speak with certainty. He had somehow an impression, though, that Jim was "raising a great shouting." Then he saw him step suddenly into the road, and limp with his stick, but with wonderful activity, towards the twist in its course that it makes round the clump of thorn-trees that shuts in the Abbey Well. The old turf-cutter saw him last just as he turned that corner.

Immediately after, a motor-car, going at a mad speed, tore along the road from the Park. Whether this car was sounding its trumpet the deaf man could not say. All he knew was that it followed without slacking down round the corner Jim had been last seen at. It vanished in a thick cloud of its own dust. The deaf man "misdoubted something had gone wrong," not from any noise, of course, but because he "watched along the road" for the dust-cloud, and none came. He suspected nothing, however, beyond some hitch in the car's working-gear, until some ten minutes later, when the motor came back, slowly—or relatively slowly. Then he saw that it contained a young lady, who looked, he said, "all mazed and staring like"; a gentleman, who lay back with blood running down his face, and seemed "no ways better than dead," and the chauffeur. Then a little dog came barking down the road, and went after the motor-car. He could see it was barking. That was all he could tell. He laid his turf-spud aside, and went along the road to find Jim and learn what he could of the mishap.

Athelstan Taylor left the Rectory, with a heavy heart, shortly before nine o'clock. He knew he should find Jim at the Abbey Well, and he wanted to make sure the news should not reach him through any other channel. It would inevitably leak out now. He knew well how things of the kind will travel, contrary to all calculations.

It occurred to him just as he was starting that if he took his dog with him, Jim's prevision of something wrong, which he looked to as likely to make his task easier, would have time to mature before his arrival. Jim would hear the dog's bark, and recognise it long before his own

footsteps could reach his ears. He had not at first intended to have the animal with him, but he now went back and released him, and felt that the idea was a good one. He could cover the ground, going by the short-cut near the Rifle Butts, in less than half-an-hour. He might be hindered on the way, but at least he would be as quick as he could. No one should be beforehand with Jim, if he could help it.

The hindrances were few and slight. Two or three colloquies of as many minutes each, ending with apologies for their brevity, made up the total of delay. Twenty-five minutes may have passed since Challis left Jim to keep his appointment, when the Rector reached the Rifle Butts and took the path that goes across from them to the Abbey Well; it branches off from the path Lizarann and Joan followed to go to the cottage.

What ensued does not explain itself, unless it is made quite clear that the curve in the road round the Abbey Well was no mere kink, but a full curve, like the letter U. One side of this U looked towards the Hall, the other to the village; and beyond it the turning for Thanet Castle, along which the motor-car came last night. The point to keep in mind is that the entrance to the Abbey Well gave towards the Hall, not the village. Nevertheless, the Well was visible from the Rifle Butts through a gap in the trees, which grew thicker on each side of the curve of the road, concealing a portion of it very completely. It was into this the motor-car vanished from the eyes of the deaf turf-cutter.

Athelstan Taylor, half broken-hearted as he thought of the task before him, had a struggle with himself not to flinch from it, and slacken the speed that was bringing it so near. He could see, shortly after passing the Rifle Butts, the figure of Lizarann's Daddy, and could picture to himself his unsuspecting ignorance. How sick he felt! How glad he would be when it was over!

He saw Jim rise from his seat and make for the entrance, and conjectured that his own footstep was the cause. He saw him stop and wait when he reached the road, and then lost sight of the entry for a moment. But he thought he heard Jim shout, as he had heard him often shout before

now, in answer to little Lizarann's call of "Pilot." When he next saw the entry there was no Jim.

He had to go only the length of the curve to get to the place where he saw Jim last. He was within five minutes of it now. Courage!

That was the motor-car from the Hall making that hideous noise. Louis Rossier, the chauffeur, going by himself, of course! He always broke out of bounds when alone, and that speed was something awful. The Felix-thorpes must have stayed at Thanes. Bess had said they were there; and now M. Louis was going to fetch them. Would he never slacken down at that bend in the road? Apparently not. A terrible corner that, to whirl a motor round at sixty miles an hour! He could hear Jim's little dog bark in answer to his own, but he was still some minutes' walk from the road. . . .

What was that cry? What were those cries, rather—cries of panic or of warning, with a woman's shriek above them? And what was that terrible cry in a voice he knew?—Jim's voice!

Then he was conscious, in spite of distance, of rapid, panic-stricken interchange of speech. Two voices, a man's and a woman's, mixed with the pulsations of the shut-off machinery of the car, checked in its course. Then of alternations of the sounds of the working-gear, which he knew meant the turning of the car in the narrow space. Then, as he reached the spot, the sound of its resumed movement, and its trumpet-signal again. When he arrived it was vanishing, but he took little heed of it or its contents. All his thought was for the man who lay, crushed and groaning, on the bare road in the sun. Would his message need to be given now?

"Twice over's soon told, Master, and there an end!" Those seemed to be Jim's words to the man who kneeled over him, not daring to touch him yet till he should know more. Should he examine him where he lay, or try at once to move him off the road?

"Oh, Jim—Jim Coupland—who has done this?" He raised the head that lay in the dust with cautious strength, fearing that any touch might only be so much more needless pain. But there was no appearance of flinching; and he

raised him further yet, to rest against his knee ; then carefully wiped the forehead, red with blood from a cut on the temple, but still there was no sign of flinching from his touch. "Can you bear to be lifted, Jim ? . . . Say if I hurt you."

"Ah !—get me up out of the gangway. I'm a job for the doctor, I take it. . . ." His voice became inaudible, but not before the word "Water !" had passed his lips. The old turf-cutter was coming slowly. If he could be raised and moved to a safe place by the roadside, for the moment, further help could be got. The Rector knew the old man would not hear if he spoke at his loudest, but he contrived to make him understand. Between them they raised poor Jim gently, and got him out of the blazing sun. His fortitude was great to utter no sound—or, was he injured to death, and half insensible ? The Rector recalled what he had heard of him in that old accident, and thought the former.

No, he was not insensible ! For when they had laid him on some soft bracken a little way off the road, and the old man had gone for assistance to the nearest cottage—for he himself did not dare to leave him—Jim tried again to speak.

"What, Jim ? Say it again !" The Rector put his ear close to catch the words.

"Make the best of me, and let my lassie come !" He was wandering, clearly. But it was easy to see his meaning—that he wished to seem as little hurt as might be to his child, whom he imagined near at hand. Easier still when he added, "She came afore. Let her come now !"

"Lizarann is not here now, Jim." The speaker's voice half choked him. But why was this worse than the other telling would have been ?

He was speaking again. It was only repetition. "She came afore. Let her come now !" His voice was all but inaudible, and the Rector's words had been lost upon him.

The deaf old man had done his errand well. The daughter of the little roadside inn, quicker of foot than he, came bringing water, and, what was needed too, brandy. Speech came again after a mouthful, swallowed with difficulty.

"Am I a bad sight, master? Let the lassie come! Never you fear for her! She's used to her Daddy." He spoke so naturally, all allowance made for pain resolutely kept at bay, that his only hearer—for the girl from the inn heard nothing—was quite at a loss. A bald truth was safe for the moment, though.

"Lizarann is not here, Jim. She cannot come to you now." The last words almost said why as well! Then both Jim's hearers heard what came quite distinctly from his lips: "What's got the lassie, Master, my lassie? I tell ye, I heard her sing out 'Pi-lot!' Aye!—once and again, 'Pi-lot!' when you was coming across the common yonder!"

But whether he himself heard the only reply Athelstan Taylor could force his lips to—"Not with me, Jim; Lizarann was not with me"—no one ever knew. For all he said was, "My little lass!" and never spoke again.

His shattered body was carried to old Margy's cottage, but the moment of death was hard to determine. All that came to light from the post-mortem examination was that the spine was injured beyond all hope of recovery, and that this was only one of several injuries, any of which might have caused death.

The windows of the ward at the Nursing Home at Chalk Cliff stand wide to allow the sweet air from the sea to come and go at will. All has been done that Death has left to do for Lizarann Coupland. Her end and its cause are certified by medical authority, and registered officially, and a little coffin has been ordered, in which the tiny white thing, like an image well carved in alabaster, that Adeline Fossett and her friend Miss Jane know is under that sheet on the bed, is to be interred shortly, as soon as its Daddy's wishes are known. They never will be, but neither lady knows that yet.

"Poor little darling!" said Miss Fossett. "Do you recollect, Jane, those very last words she said?"

"About the Pilot?"

"No, no—after that. I wasn't sure you heard. I had tried to tell her what... what it was... and I couldn't find words. But I fancy the little thing half understood,

too. What she said was—quite clearly—‘But who’s a-going to tell my Daddy!’ It was so like herself.” The speaker breaks down; but then, you see, she had taken Lizarann to her heart so thoroughly—was thinking she would never have another child she should be so fond of. Miss Jane is used to these things, and affects strength.

“I think it will be ready for the flowers now,” she says, and removes that sheet. Yes, the handkerchief round the face may come away. The two ladies place flowers round the little alabaster head. It is the head, one would say, of a sweet little girl, and the mouth is not too large for beauty now, although that line of black is in the lips.

So it came to pass that neither Lizarann nor her Daddy lived to mourn the loss of the other. The child was never an orphan, and the father only childless an hour or so. And Lizarann never knew what his employment had been, but cherished to the last an untainted memory of those happy days when she led him home, blind but otherwise uninjured, from the honourable fulfilment of some mysterious public service. And yet, had she known, would she have thought it other than right? For, was it not Daddy?



## CHAPTER XLIX

ROYD HALL was at its quietest that morning when the young man Samuel answered the bell from his master's bedroom, and found the Baronet still in bed, at a few minutes after nine. The old gentleman must have dozed off again after ringing it, because Samuel had to knock twice before he said "Come in."

"I thought you rang, sir," said Samuel.

"I did ring. Who was that went away in the motor five minutes ago?"

Samuel was not going to admit that the motor had been gone a full quarter of an hour. It would have been disrespectful to suggest that his master had been asleep unaware, so he accepted the five-minutes estimate. "I believe it was Miss Judith, sir; but I couldn't say, to be certain."

"Just ask. What o'clock is it?"

"It's gone nine, some minutes, sir."

"This coffee's cold . . . never mind! . . . I suppose I went to sleep again. . . . Oh, Samuel! . . ." Samuel, departing, paused. "See that the cold douche is cold. It was neither one thing nor the other yesterday."

"Sure to be cold, sir, now! Because both the other gentlemen's run it on." To those acquainted with the heating gear of bath-rooms the way the cold supply proves lukewarm, and nothing bracing comes to pass, is well known. The Baronet referred to it again as he met Samuel returning on his way to the bath. Was he sure it was cold? Yes, Samuel was; and that *was* Miss Judith, he found, that had gone off in the motor, after breakfasting early in her own room. As witness Mr. Elphinstone and Miss Judith's maid Tilley.

Sir Murgatroyd never wondered much at anything his

family did. He had a beautiful faith that everything was all right always, and asked few or no questions. Still, he would wonder a little, tentatively, at rare intervals. Only he strained at gnats and swallowed camels. This time he swallowed the camel of Judith's early departure after a solitary breakfast. That was all right—it was some appointment with the Duchess, "or something." But he strained at the gnat of her having left her little attendant behind. He had a superstition that the absence of any two persons, known to be together, was never a thing to cause anxiety; but he was liable to fidgeting about any of his family unaccounted for, if he supposed them to be alone. There may be other people like him.

It was this superstition that caused Sir Murgatroyd to say to Lady Arkroyd—through a door between their rooms that he opened on purpose, having become aware of the departure of her ladyship's maid—"What has Judith gone out so early for?" To which the reply was: "You must speak plainer. I can't hear you while you shave." For during shaving the shaver's attention cannot be fully given to speech, owing to the interdependence of razor, eye, and jaw in a delicate relation to one another, to say nothing of the care needed to preserve a soapless mouth.

So Sir Murgatroyd wound up his shave before he spoke again, adding to his first question the words, "In the motor."

"How do you know she went in the motor?"

"Samuel said so. Besides, I heard it go."

"I suppose I was asleep. . . . Oh no!—I can't account for Judith's vagaries. She goes her own way. I suppose she's taken the child with her—her maid, I mean?"

"Why, no, she hasn't! That's just it. . . ."

"I didn't mean that. I meant that if she hadn't, Cintilla would know." That is to say, her ladyship washed her hands of any complicity in the Bart.'s superstition spoken of above. She always, in talking of her husband, to the Duchess for instance, affected a Spartan stolidity; saying that no one who did not know him as she did would ever suspect Murgatroyd of being such an hysterical character.

Nevertheless, she felt curiosity about Judith, and bade

Mrs. Cream, her own lady's-maid, summon Cintilla to give evidence. Only first she closed the door into her husband's room, not to be open to any imputation of hysteria. The Baronet accepted his exclusion the more readily that he had just rung for Samuel. For his relation towards that young man, who was officially his valet, was that he allowed him to help him on with his coat as soon as he himself was otherwise complete. He had to, or Samuel wouldn't have been his valet.

It was nearly a quarter to ten when her ladyship said to her son-in-law and Mr. Brownrigg, the only guest outside the family, that we were frightfully late at breakfast. She said it on the long terrace the breakfast-room opens on, where the two gentlemen had been for some time wondering whether they were to have any. A peacock shrieked a condemnation of late breakfasts; and the Baronet, appearing last, took the sins of the congregation on his shoulders. His lateness eclipsed all previous lateness.

But he must needs make matters worse; for after communications about Sibyl, and record of her husband's conviction that that young lady would pay attention to her medical adviser, and not appear at breakfast, he enquired about Judith's escapade, as a Baronet enquires when he really wants to know, not as mere passing chat. To which her ladyship replied, as one whose patience is tried by an inopportune husband: "There, my dear, Judith is all right if you'll only leave her alone. I know all about her. She's gone to go somewhere with Thyringia, and won't be back till I don't know when. Now don't hinder, and do let's have breakfast. . . . No, Elphinstone, don't sound the gong on any account. We're all here. I do hate that banging." For her husband, the fidget, had suggested absurdly that perhaps Judith was back, and didn't know breakfast was ready. "Besides, she *had* breakfasted, anyhow!" adds her ladyship.

Lord Felixthorpe has a word of illumination for the Baronet, who has acquiesced in the will of a senior officer. It causes him to recur to the subject again, saying, "Frank says Judith asked for the car yesterday . . ." and to be again extinguished with an impatient, "My dear!—do you suppose I don't know all about it?" from her ladyship.

When that scanty gathering of four persons sat down to breakfast at the table where last year this story told of so large an assemblage, Royd Park and mansion alike seemed a haven of serene peace, sheltered from impact with the outer world, and unconscious of its turmoil. Every sound of living creatures was as good as silence—articulate with its denials of discord. Even the peacock's screech upon the lawn fell in with the music of the wood-doves in the beech-woods—just a high staccato note; no more!—and the gobble of a turkey from the stable-yard, across the big red wall there, was modulated to its place as an instrument the composer should not use too freely, though full of spirit. A million undertones of insects; a perspective of scattered voices afar, each fainter than the last; the sound of the manger-chain of a horse in the groom's hands—all agreed that whatever that railway-whistle might mean about the world a league and more away, here in this sacred enclosure was peace—peace guaranteed by a by-gone peace of vanished years, and a security of entail. Peace without end, Amen!

So much so that when the motor-trumpet was suddenly audible, but unmistakably, beyond the Park Gate on the road from the village, each of the four at breakfast looked at some other, and said—there it was! But they were undisturbed in their minds, and gave various consideration to Yorkshire ham and filleted plaice and potted beef and Keiller, and all that one associates with clean damask and steaming urns. The Baronet only said, with apparent sense of relief: "I thought she could hardly have gone for the whole day." To which his wife replied: "Oh, my dear, how funny you are! Don't you know Judith?" And then they talked current topics of the day—Raisuli and Employer's Liability.

The motor-trumpet close at hand, and wheels! Now we shall know. But not so soon that we need leave Morocco for a moment. And Mr. Brownrigg will take half a cup more coffee.

What is that, Elphinstone? May Mr. Elphinstone speak to her ladyship? He may; so he does, in an undertone. Her ladyship says, "I'll come," and then to Mr. Brownrigg, "The milk's beside you," and follows the

butler from the room. All the three men look at each other. "Something wrong!" says Lord Felixthorpe. He and the Baronet look the enquiry at one another. "Ought we not to follow?" and both answer, "Yes!" at once, aloud. Mr. Brownrigg neglects his coffee and follows, looking concerned and apprehensive.

There is a lobby between the dining-room and the entrance-hall to the house, and her ladyship meets them in it, returning. She says to her husband: "Oh, my dear!—you will have to come, about this." She is looking ashy white, and when she has spoken sinks down on a wall-seat in a recess, saying: "Oh dear! Do go out and see." She is quite overcome by something.

A new identity comes suddenly on Sir Murgatroyd. "See to her, Frank," he says. "Is Mrs. Cream there—yes?—See to your mistress, Cream." And goes out.

The butler is just beyond the lobby, and the firm voice of the Baronet is audible above his terrified undertone. "Who is it?... Sir Alfred Challis?... Badly?" The speaker then passes out of hearing, going to the entrance-hall.

Mrs. Cream has come, and finds that her mistress has not fainted away, though not far short of it. Her ladyship rallies, saying to her son-in-law: "Never mind me, Frank!" Whereupon Lord Felixthorpe says: "You'll excuse me, Brownrigg, but I *must* see to my wife. She'll be frightened if I don't." And goes three steps at a time up a side-staircase, leaving Mr. Brownrigg embarrassed, and feeling in the way.

When Sir Murgatroyd set foot outside his house, the first thing he saw was the face of his daughter, still seated in the car, supporting the head of the man who was with her, but shrinking from it, covered as it was with some shawl or cloth, in terror. The first words he heard, above the drumming beat of the stationary car's machinery and the hysterical excitement of the chauffeur, dismounted from his seat, were a relief to him. His daughter, at any rate, was uninjured, or only shaken at the worst. "I am not the least hurt," she said, with perfect self-command, though in a bewildered, stony way. Her dress was not

soiled or seriously disordered, so she could not have been thrown from the car.

His hearers at first thought M. Louis incoherent. "C'était la faute de ce sacré aveugle—qui m'y trouvera à redire—moi ? Qu'ai-je pu faire, moi ?—c'est l'arbre du frein qui m'a trompé. J'ai tiré la manivelle—oui !—et elle m'a trompé. Peste soit de cet aveugle. . . ." And so on. He was understood by no one.

"Get this man out of the way ; he's no use. Where's Bullett ?" Thus the Baronet. "Now, Elphinstone, get that deck-chair—the long one, you know—look sharp about it !" Elphinstone departed, as Bullett, the model groom, came running. "The roan, in the dogcart," said his master ; and then : "Yes, my dear, you shall tell me directly." For Judith was beginning : "It has not been my fault. . . ." She was speaking like a woman in a dream, or one half waking from one.

Her father only glanced at the white face with the blood on it, then covered it again. "He might be able to get some brandy down," said he. He stood with his finger on Challis's pulse till it came, and then tried to get him to swallow some, but without success. "We must get him in," he said. "Where's Frank ?" Samuel testified that his lordship was just coming downstairs. The fact was that his lordship, although his solicitude for his wife had been appreciated, had been told not to be absurd, but to go away and make himself useful.

He arrived just as the long deck-chair was brought—one such as one sees on passenger boats for India and China—and assisted in transporting the man who lay absolutely insensible on it to the room he had occupied when he had last visited the house as a guest—the room where he missed that postscript of Marianne's, and probably sowed the seeds of all this mischief. It was easy for three to carry the chair—one on either side and one behind—so the Baronet left it to his son-in-law and Elphinstone and Samuel, and went to speak to Bullett, who had just arrived with the dogcart. On his way, coming from the lobby, he met Mr. Brownrigg, looking horribly shocked.

"Is it Challis ?" said that gentleman. The Baronet nodded.

"It's the author," said he. "Is my wife still there?" He pointed to the lobby.

"She has gone upstairs to Lady Felixthorpe, I think. Can I be of any service?"

"A thousand thanks! I don't know of anything. . . . Yes, I do, though. My groom is just going to bring the doctor. Will you ride with him and call at the Rectory!—tell Taylor of this, and get him to come at once. He and Mr. Challis—Sir Alfred Challis I should say—were great friends. He'll come."

"I will go with pleasure," said Mr. Brownrigg. He went with pleasure, evidently. It is, of course, a great satisfaction to be of use in any painful crisis.

Sir Murgatroyd, as he turned to the entrance-door again, met Judith, who was accompanied by her little maid, terrified beyond measure, but behaving well. She gave an inanimate face to her father to kiss, saying collectedly, but in the same stony way: "There really is no occasion for anxiety about me. I am perfectly safe. Only don't ask me to talk about it now." Her father followed her in silence to the door of her room, when she turned and spoke again, after a visible effort that failed. "Is he killed?" she said, forcing the word out.

"Oh no!—no, no!—no such thing! Stunned—contused—that sort of thing! I've sent Bullett for Pordage. I should have sent the car, but Monsieur Loui isn't in a state to manage it. There would have been another accident. . . . What?"

"Tell them—mamma and Sibyl—not to disturb me. I will tell you after. . . . No! When the doctor has seen him, tell my little maid here. She will bring me word." And then Judith, whose beauty had lost nothing by the shock she has sustained—if anything, the reverse—vanishes into her room, and her father hears the key in the lock turned significantly. In the old Baronet's look now, roused as he is from his easy-going homeliness, and with a certain resolve growing on him, one sees that that beauty is not inherited from her mother alone. He goes straight to the room where the injured man lies, still insensible and motionless, still with a low pulse that neither gains nor loses. The doctor cannot be very long, if Bullett finds

him at home. His practice is to remain at home in the morning.

"Do you know anything of all this?" Sir Murgatroyd asks the question of his wife and younger daughter in the bedroom of the latter, where he has found them, white and frightened—talking in a nervous undertone, but quickly, and as folk talk who can tell things.

"She *has* been seeing him. Sibyl says so."

"Seeing Challis?"

"Of course. But she hasn't spoken of him to me for a month—quite a month." This was her ladyship.

"I told you it would be no use, *madre*," says Sibyl.

"But you wouldn't listen to me."

"My dear—how unreasonable you are! How was it possible for your father and me to allow it to go on? You may say what you like, but he *is* a married man. . . ."

"All I say is, you made matters worse."

"Never mind that now!" said the Baronet. "What I want to hear is—how did Sib know this was going on?"

Sibyl is quite clear on that point. "Judith met him in the Park the day before we came, last month. Old Mrs. Inskip saw them together, behaving like a couple of—like *lovers*." Her tone is one of reprobation and disgust. She goes on to tell how she had interviewed the centenarian on the subject, and been fully enlightened.

"That is all at an end now, anyhow." So says the Baronet, but when his wife says "Why?" he does not answer, but goes on as to another point reflectively. "Judith must have met him on her way to Thanet. . . . Where did he join her—this morning, I mean?"

Both ladies strike a new clue. "Was she going to Thanet at all?" And Sibyl adds: "I don't believe she was."

"You said you *knew* she was, Therèse," says Sir Murgatroyd, addressing his wife by her name—a thing that always means, with him, a definite attitude of some sort. She is on her mettle directly, for expostulation or defence.

"My dear, I never said anything of the sort. She talked yesterday of going to-day, and, of course, I *supposed* she had. That little girl of hers only said she said she might not



be back to lunch." Her ladyship exonerates herself at some length, denying what she had said plainly an hour before at breakfast.

Her husband treats the point as an open one, to avoid indefinite discussion of it. "I see," he says. "It was only your inference. I wonder if that crazy French chap has come to his senses. It's no use my talking to him. I can't understand three words he says." Then at Sibyl's suggestion, he went away to his son-in-law, who was still with the injured man, to get him to interview the bewildered chauffeur, and see what could be made of his testimony. During Lord Felixthorpe's absence he remained by Challis, still perfectly insensible on the bed, but apparently only stunned, like a man in a deep sleep. He breathed regularly, and though his pulse dragged a little, it was quite steady. Sir Murgatroyd felt only moderate uneasiness about him. He had himself been thrown from his horse in the hunting-field, and remained insensible till next day.

Lord Felixthorpe returned. The chauffeur's account of the thing, now that his mind was more settled, was that, in order to avoid a collision with a man in the road, he had swerved at a sharp corner. Challis started to his feet at the moment, and was thrown over the edge of the car, falling on his head in the road. "Mademoiselle"—so ran M. Louis' testimony—"était terriblement épouvantée, mais elle ne s'est pas évanouie," Lord Felixthorpe translated, for the benefit of the Baronet. "Alors," said M. Louis, "nous avons soulevé le corps, nous deux, dans l'automobile, et Mademoiselle m'a crié—en avant, vite, vite! Et moi, j'ai retourné vite, vite! Qu'est ce qu'on aurait voulu de plus?" Questioned as to where Challis had got into the car, he replied—at the Park Gate; as to what he understood its destination to be, that he did not know anything except that it was about forty miles off, but that Monsieur had a map with the route marked; as to when Miss Arkroyd had requisitioned the car, that she had spoken about it to him overnight. Milord had instructed him that it would not be required during the day, as he himself should *monter à cheval*, and Miladi would remain at home. It was to be at Mademoiselle's disposal, or Miladi Arkroyd's. "Effectivement," said he, in an injured tone,

"j'ai suivi mes renseignements, et je ne suis pas à blâmer." His lordship had then explained to him that he need not be so touchy; no one was blaming him. There was another point. Who was the man who caused the car to swerve, and was he hurt? Monsieur Louis replied with the Frenchest of shrugs, "Mais je ne sais pas! Comment voulez-vous que je sache?—quelque vagabond—quelque mendiant!" He turned the conversation to the damage done to a tyre.

Had Lord Felixthorpe heard the chauffeur's words on his first arrival, a suspicion he now felt that M. Louis was keeping something back would have been greatly strengthened. Sir Murgatroyd may have noticed the discrepancy, but he said nothing at the time. His only remark was, "We shall know more of this soon."

Presently Lord Felixthorpe said: "It certainly does occur to me that my sister-in-law would be able to contribute some valuable information, and I do not understand that she is any the worse for this mishap, fright apart. Why should we not . . . ?" He stopped short; for his father-in-law had touched him with his finger, saying only, "Frank!" The manner of it made him end with, "Why—do you know anything?"

"When was that Bill to go into Committee—the Deceased Wife's Sister—you know?"

"What's to-day? Saturday? It was yesterday, Friday. Why? . . . Do you suppose . . . ?"

"It may have something to do with this—mind you, I only say *may* have! . . . I suppose the *Times* has come?"

"I'll see." He went out and spoke to Elphinstone over the great staircase, and returned. "I've told him to bring the papers here."

"Yes—here we are!" said the Baronet, five minutes after, controlling an outspread sheet of last night's Debates. He went on, reading scrapwise: "'Lord Shaftesbury moved amendment to remove from Bill retrospective character . . . very indistinctly heard in gallery . . . no real hardship would be inflicted by amendment . . . persons who had contracted these marriages fully conscious of legal consequences involved' . . . hm-hum!" and so on. "Where's the end of it? . . . oh—here! 'Amendment withdrawn.'"

Yes, Frank, that may have something to do with it—may have a great deal!"

"I'm not sure that I follow. Has it to do with . . . ?" He dropped his voice, and looked towards the motionless figure on the bed.

"Of course it has . . . *he* won't hear—you needn't be uneasy. I was just like that. . . . Well!—we'll talk outside if you like. . . . Yes, look at this, Frank: Prorogation is next Wednesday, when this Bill will receive the Royal Assent, and become law. Until next Wednesday at mid-day, or thereabouts, Challis's wife isn't his wife, and any woman he marries on Monday or Tuesday is. He couldn't even be convicted of bigamy unless his first marriage was held legal, and that would be rather discourteous to the Royal Assent on Wednesday. *Now* do you see?"

"Surely you never can imagine . . ."

"Well!"

"Surely you never can imagine that Sir Challis and Ju were going to make a runaway-match of it, to outwit the action of this Bill . . ."

"I can only see this," says the Baronet: "that if they did not do so, they were losing the only chance they had left of making an honourable match of any sort or kind. Isn't that the doctor?"

It is the footstep of the roan, unmistakable, and the wheels of the dogcart, at speed. It is poor little Lizarann's friend, Dr. Sidrophel. But all his old look has left him—a look as though he was born to be amused, and found his patients diverting—as he comes quickly to Challis's room, meeting the two gentlemen on the way, to whom he speaks very little. He nods once or twice, in reply to a brief abstract of the accident, saying only, "Let's have a look at him!" He finds time to say that the Rector could not come, but would come later. There was a good deal to be done. The Baronet did not seem to understand *this*.

The household has fought shy of touching an insensible patient, pending a doctor on the way, especially as there is no visible hæmorrhage. The blood from a cut on the temple was not renewed when the face was wiped with a sponge on his first arrival at the house. The doctor makes

a very rapid examination. "You wish him to remain here, Sir Murgatroyd?" he says.

"To remain here? Of course I do."

"Then I must have his clothes off first. The cut's nothing on the forehead. That can wait."

The coat must be sacrificed, but it can't be helped. Slit up the sleeves, and off with it! Better than jarring him about in his present state. Once wardrobe-saving is discarded, it is easy work to get the author in trim for a careful overhauling. No bones broken, is the verdict. All the worse! His head took most of his weight, and bore the shock. A broken knee-joint might have spared his brain. As it is, Dr. Pordage seems to think the net volumes may come slower in the future. Besides, you never can tell at first about the spine in cases of this sort.

For the present, concession must be made to treatment. It never does to do absolutely nothing. So let's have mustard and hot water to the feet, and ammonia to the nostrils, and try to get a little brandy down his throat. But quiet is *the* thing. Presently, all that seems feasible has been done, and quiet is to have its opportunity. Still, quite insensible!

Ought not Mrs. Challis, or Lady Challis, whichever she is, to be communicated with? The question is a joint-stock one in which Lady Arkroyd and Sibyl have shares, having come into conference. Of course, they were not on terms—her ladyship says this—but is that our concern?

"I shouldn't put it on that, Lady Arkroyd," says the doctor. "He'll probably be conscious in a few hours. Better not alarm her needlessly. If he continues unconscious for twenty-four hours . . . why, then we might think about it. But I don't suppose him to be in any danger." The speaker's serious manner, unlike himself, seemed out of keeping with his light estimate of Challis's danger.

"We haven't got her address, so we can't, and there's no use talking about it. Unless Judith knows. Only it seems she's not to be got at." This is Sibyl, not without asperity.

"How is Miss Arkroyd?" says the doctor, whose emphasis on the verb means, "I am conscious that I ought to have asked before, and my doing it now is rather a

formality." Lady Arkroyd testifies that Judith is in her room lying down, but was all right when she spoke to her through the door—oh yes,—she seemed perfectly right, but had locked herself in, and wanted to be quiet. The Baronet says, to his wife only, "Perhaps we had better leave her alone, Therès." And Therèse replies, "Oh, I'm sure I don't want to meddle with her." Impatience with Miss Arkroyd is in the air. She is credited with being the underlying cause of all this disturbance.

There is a surprise in the bush for her father; only half-informed, so far. For the doctor, departing, pauses and says gravely, hesitatingly: "I believe—but I don't know—that the inquest will be on Monday or Tuesday."

"*The inquest!—Why inquest? What inquest?*" The Baronet is absolutely in the dark about everything but Challis's mishap. His wife, better informed by the groom during the doctor's visit to his patient, touches him on the arm, saying, "My dear, Dr. Pordage is referring to the man..." and falters.

"There was a man killed," says Sibyl abruptly. "We supposed you knew."

"A man killed! Good God! I knew nothing. What man?"

Sibyl's husband overhears, and comes quickly. "What is that about a man killed?" he says. He also is completely taken aback.

Then Lady Arkroyd says again, "We thought you knew." And the doctor follows, saying collectedly, "Jim Coupland, the man at the Abbey Well, was struck by the motor-car and killed. The Rector found him lying dead in the road. That is why Mr. Taylor did not accompany me. He will be here shortly, and will tell you more than I can."

Sir Murgatroyd gazes from one to the other, shocked and speechless. Lord Felixthorpe, nearly as much concerned, says below his breath, "That miscreant Fossier never said a word to me of this." But he is preoccupied and ill-at-ease about his wife, who will be none the better just now for upsets and tragic surprises. He persuades her to go back to the quiet of her room, in spite of her protests that he is nonsensical, saying as he goes away with her, "We'll

have that French scoundrel up when I come back. I won't be three minutes." But he was a little longer, and when he returned, the doctor, who was wanted elsewhere, was on his way back. He found his father-in-law alone in the library, sitting with his head on his hand, as though completely oppressed and stunned with what he had heard. "Oh, Frank," said the old gentleman, "this is horrible!" He had made sure that the patient upstairs was properly looked to, and had sat down to rest and be quiet until Athelstan Taylor's arrival. But the chauffeur might be sent for.

A female servant, told off to mount guard over the patient, and report any change or movement, had been at her post about a quarter of an hour, when Miss Arkroyd opened the door and came into the room. "Don't go, Hetty," was all she said. She looked as white—so Hetty reported afterwards—as the clean wristband that young woman made use of in illustration. Also, her hair was all coming down. She stood at the bedside maybe a minute, maybe two—Hetty couldn't say—then touched the inanimate hand on the coverlid. "Oh no; she never took hold," said Hetty. "Touched and drew back like!" Then she turned to the girl and said, "Have *you* heard what the doctor said?" rather as if she took scanty information for granted. "But, of course, I could tell her all right," said Hetty, who had been taking notice. "Only she didn't any more than just stop to hear, but went. My word!—she *was* looking bad."

She must have slipped back quietly into her room after this, taking the young girl Cintilla with her. For when her mother, an hour later, after consultation as to the wisdom of the step, went to her door to try again for admission, it was opened by Cintilla, and Judith's voice said, "Oh yes, come in; I want to hear what the doctor said." But her speech was so composed as scarcely to comply with the show of feeling the circumstances demanded, even if the runaway-match idea was not a well-grounded one.

M. Fossier did not make a good figure when summoned to appear in the library. He bristled and stood on his

defence at once, instead of making, as requested, a simple statement of his version of the facts. Perhaps Sir Murgatroyd would have done more wisely not to remind a witness under examination that he himself was a Justice of the Peace; it tended to invest him with the character of a *Juge d'Instruction*, and M. Louis with that of "the accused." The latter was as strange to the idea of waiting for a proof of guilt as the former to that of demanding a proof of innocence.

Oh yes!—there was a man in the road—what did M. Louis know? He came from a *sentier* by the roadside. But, said his master, speaking French *de rigueur*, as English was not understood, "Cet homme était au mi-chemin," meaning in the middle of the road. M. Louis misunderstood, or pretended to. "J'avais passé le mi-chemin," said he, meaning, apparently, half-way to the village. Then he tried to assist by speaking English. "He wass bloke ze hackross," and then finished naturally with, "Que diable allait il faire au milieu de la rue?"

"Ou—avez—vous—vu—dernièrement—cet homme?" said the Baronet, a loud word at a time, to make sure of reaching that strange organism, a foreigner's brain. M. Louis understood, anyhow.

"A peine l'ai-je vu! Je n'ai fait que jeter un coup d'œil, et pst!—il est disparu. Je ne l'ai pas cru blessé. Pour moi, il n'a pas souffert la moindre égratignure. Que voulez-vous? On ne peut pas avoir l'œil à tout!" But his speech was not absolutely consistent, for he added, "Pourquoi diable ne put-il pas s'abriter sous la haie?" He evidently thought the road belonged to the motor interest, and that the world ought to run for the nearest sheltered corner at the sound of his horn.

Lord Felixthorpe endeavoured to impress him with the advisability of telling the truth, as a mere matter of policy. There would be a case to go to a Jury, unless the inquest decided that Jim Coupland had died by the Visitation of Providence. But M. Louis might feel secure of fair treatment; and, unless he had sinned grossly, need be under no apprehension of serious consequences to himself. As the chauffeur knew he *had* sinned grossly, in not slacking speed at the curve, his apprehensions continued. But he

seemed convinced, when he went away, that it might be wisest to say the least possible for the present.

"We must look out sharp," said Sir Murgatroyd, "and make sure the Coroner's Jury is fairly chosen. I can't have any leniency shown to County Families, Frank. I'm inclined now towards seeing what I can make of Judith. I see no use putting it off.... By-the-bye, Frank, what did that story-telling Mossco mean by talking about a blind man—avoogle's blind, isn't it?—and then saying he hardly saw Jim?... what?..."

"I didn't hear him say anything about a blind man."

"No, no—before you came—when he first came back. He said 'avoogle.'"

"I expect he knows all about it. See what Judith has to say!"

Sir Murgatroyd didn't seem at all in a hurry for his interview with his daughter. He hung about, finishing topics up. He dropped his voice to say, "Poor Jim! Taylor said he was just expecting his little girl back. And now she'll come back and find him lying dead."

"Ah—the nice little girl, Lizarann. Yes—I had forgotten Lizarann. Poor little woman!" For remember it was this young swell who had made Lizarann's acquaintance near two years since, in Tallack Street. Do you recollect?—when William Rufus called him Scipio.



## CHAPTER I.

MARIANNE CHALLIS, or, as she preferred to be called, Craik, had sentenced herself to an embittered life, and knew it. But she had, as we have said, so much in her of the dogged tenacity and vergefulness of a Red Indian brave that scarcely any idea of surrender had ever, so far, entered her mind. Whenever the smallest suspicion of wavering had approached its outskirts, during the year-and-a-half of her residence with her mother at Broadstairs, she had at once brought into the field an auxiliary force, the consolation to her conscience that she was, at least, no longer "living in sin" with the father of her children. Even if her jealousy of what she found a satisfaction in calling his "connection with" Miss Arkroyd—a phrase first used, dexterously, by Charlotte Eldridge—had been ill-founded, which it wasn't, it would have been a misapprehension to be thankful for, in that it had made her alive to the heinousness of her immoral life, and qualified her to go before the Bar of an Offended God, not only with mere lame apologies for the existence of her two girls, but with a statement of account, claiming payment of Joy over the Sinner that Repenteth. Where would have been the use of pleading before that Awful Throne, that she was "only Kate's half-sister"?

This story knows that accusation will be brought against it of "sneering" at things sacred; but let the accuser try to depict the frame of mind of this poor lady without seeming to do so. Marianne had accepted her mother's Choctaw Deity, a creation of the sullen vices of her own mind, on the strength of an assurance that he was also the God of the man who paid, in Syria, the penalty of the most intrepid and magnificent attempt to touch the hearts of men the world has ever known. Let him be sure that when he talks of "things sacred" he is really holding

those things sacred that that man was tortured to death for proclaiming the truth of, two thousand years ago, and that he is not exalting the comicalities of a Theologism.

But the outcome of it all was an embittered life for Marianne. And the bitterness was bound to come out—could not be concealed. It showed itself in severity towards her children to some extent, but very much more in acrimony towards her mother. It was just as well, perhaps, that the safety-valve existed. The worthy old lady would have been quarrelling with some one else if she had not quarrelled with her daughter; so it was all one to her.

This old lady was the soul of dissension and savage righteousness. It must not be understood that what Bob called a "regular set-to between Gran and the Mater" was of daily occurrence. Often a week would pass without a battle-royal. But no hour ever passed without an exchange of shots. Bob's reports to his father of the life at Belvedere Villa, Broadstairs, were highly coloured, perhaps, but they enabled the author to picture to himself a daily routine not far from the truth. When Bob stated that Old Gran was all shaky-waky with rage to begin with, and would pucker up and fly out at a moment's notice if you didn't look uncommon sharp, Challis accepted the first clause of the indictment as a false diagnosis of the tremulousness of old age; the second as realistic poetry; and the condition precedent of immunity at the end as an admission that his son's own attitude was not always faultless. When that young man said it was "pray, pray, pray, all day long," and he didn't see the fun, his father perceived that his meaning was that religious exercises were protracted beyond usage, for instance, of the Deanery at Inchester; where, according to Bob, it was "once and done with." Besides, the Dean didn't snuffle, and Old Gran did. Challis remarked that Bob would have cut a poor figure as a Hindu Yogi, and felt grateful in his heart to Dean Tillotson for not snuffing. It might arrest a violent reaction on Bob's part against all Religion, Law, Order, and Morality. For Challis would not trust anyone but himself without the first; weak natures, like other people's, might lose touch with the other three as well,

and take to the secret manufacture of melinite. He never suspected himself of a weak nature.

These illuminations had been thrown on Belvedere Villa after Bob's first visit there, a year since. This August he was acquiring more dignified forms of speech, befitting a fifth-form boy. But he was still capable of saying that he had seen "awfully little" of his Governor these holidays. Indeed, if he had not gone with him to a place in Derbyshire for a week, he would hardly have set eyes on him. Then if his Governor was stopping on a week at this beastly little place—Heaven knows why!—why shouldn't *he*? Why was *he* to go to Broadstairs? However, he went. And from Broadstairs he wrote to his Governor, at Brideswell-Poulgreave, Derby, saying that Gran was "as bad, if not worse, than ever," and provoked severe criticism of his English in reply. He had his revenge, though, for he pelted his Governor with samples of the same solecism, cut from current literature, till the accumulations became quite formidable.

It may seem strange, but the story must record it, that almost the only thing that gave poor Marianne any real pleasure during this year-and-a-half in her mother's nouse was the reading from time to time in the newspapers of the literary successes of "Titus"; for to her he never ceased to be Titus. So self-contradictory was her frame of mind that, when "Aminta Torrington" made such a sensation just after Christmas, her bosom swelled with pride over the play's success, just as though she herself had been by the author's side at the fall of the curtain. Her curiosity was intense to know whether or not the name of the actress who personated Aminta was her own or one assumed by that detestable woman to whom she owed all her unhappiness. "Silvia Berens" puzzled her, because it sounded familiar. But not sufficiently so to be sure she had known it in those last days she had spent at the Hermitage.

It was a grievous vexation to have no one she could take into her confidence. She would have shrunk from showing her inner mind to her mother, even if there had been the slightest prospect of the old woman knowing anything on dramatic or literary subjects; and when she threw out a feeler to Charlotte Eldridge, that lady irritated her

by taking. She granted that the pleasure she had expressed was a creditable impulse of generosity, and not spontaneous at all. Just like Charlotte! And all the while her pleasure was a reality she had a right to indulge in—a luxury she could allow herself without any weak concession to feelings she had destined to extinction.

For the fact is Marianne had never ceased to love the father of her children. Can a woman ever succeed in doing so, except by hating him? Now, Chootaw as she was, she was under no obligation to detest her husband as long as she could fully gratify her hatred elsewhere. Judith Arkroyd had the full benefit of it—drew the fire of her batteries on herself. Oh, the hypocrisy of that letter the girl had the impertinence to write to her! But *she* saw through it. As for Titus, did she not know him well enough to know he would be mere wax in the hands of a designing woman like that? Oh yes!—*she* knew how to flatter him, no doubt! And how to make the best of herself, too. Charlotte could at least sympathize about *that*; *she* knew the sort this Judith was! Indeed, Charlotte had been liberal in her realistic suggestions about Judith, who may have been in some ways no better than she made her out, but who was certainly short of the standard of depravity this moralist vouched for in telegraph-girls, her *bêtes-noires* in all that touched the purity of the domestic hearth. Charlotte's sidelights on the Tophet incident, as explained in "that hypocritical letter from the girl herself," would have done credit to Paul de Kock.

Chewing this cud—or these cuds; which should it be?—would take the poor woman so perilously near a fit of exculpation of Titus that she was often forced to have recourse to the old story of their consanguinity to keep her resentment up to the mark. Yes!—*she* would—*she* could—go through a mental operation technically called "forgiving" Titus. But go back to him? No! She had sinned, all those years, in ignorance, and with a false ideal of her husband, who had now fallen from his high estate. And look you!—it was not only this Judith business. How about that other story? How about that Steptoe story, not an hour's walk from here? She found the neighbourhood of Ramsgate oppressive to her.

No—she could never go back to Titus, whatever happened. Not even if this Bill that was to come into Parliament were to make marriages like hers and Titus's lawful for the future. What was wrong was wrong, and how the House of Lords could make it right was more than Marianne could understand. She wasn't aware that it was the House of Lords that originally made it wrong.

But if she did her duty towards the supposed instructions of Holy Writ—which she did not doubt could be found somewhere, as her mother was so positive about them—she might claim as a set-off the pleasure of reading the literary columns of the daily Press in the hope of coming on Titus's name. She did more reading in that year-and-a-half than she had done in all the rest of her life put together. And as she was not literate enough to skim, she had to plod; and plodding is slow work in the columns of a voluminous Sunday paper—the largest possible paper in the smallest possible type. But one does get a lot for one's penny, whether it's *Lloyd's Weekly*, or the *Dispatch*, or the *People*; and there's sure to be all the theatrical news and recent publications, whichever you take. So Marianne pored intently over one or the other, every Sunday afternoon, on the sofa; while her parent dipped into sermons, or ran her eye through the Prayer-book, now and then looking at the newspaper. Not, that is to say, in the mere cant sense of the phrase, but glaring at it wolfishly over her own more legible type, with a basilisk eye to slay the profane intruder. The presence of the unhallowed secular abomination in the house on the Lord's Day was a bone of contention between the mother and daughter; but the old lady had had to give in, and every Sunday afternoon saw strained relations in abeyance, and the tension of a skin-deep concord, that might or might not last until the children should be allowed down, and given the obnoxious thing to make boats of.

On this particular Sunday—the day following the events of last chapter—Marianne's attention seemed deeper and more prolonged than usual. She had found something that interested her. It was taxing her apprehension severely, and she had no one to go to for enlightenment. But it is not human to accept exasperation in silence, and

Marianne saw a prospect of relief in putting her mother's uselessness as an informant on record. So she said, as though referring to a matter of course, "I suppose it's no use asking *you* what these Parliament things mean," and went on reading.

Few people admit complete ignorance in any department without a struggle. "Perhaps I know nothing about anything," said the old woman, snarling meekly. "Perhaps I know more than you choose to think I know. Now snap!" These last words claimed the position of a private reflection made by a person of rare self-restraint in a den of mad dogs. There was nothing unlike her mother in them, and Marianne left them unnoticed, and continued:

"I suppose you don't know what is meant by 'an amendment to remove from the Bill its retrospective character'?" For Marianne had got at the report of the sitting of the House of Lords of two days since; and though she had kept herself uninformed, intentionally, on the subject related to, still, when she saw it all in print, her curiosity took the bit in its teeth, and she read.

"It happens that you are entirely wrong, because it happens that that is just the one thing I do happen to know. But I shall not talk about it on this day." This resolution lasted quite three minutes, when the speaker resumed, under a kind of protest that the little she had to say wouldn't count, "You know perfectly well what Mr. Tillingfleet said in his last letter about this wicked Bill business."

"What did he say?"

"You know perfectly well."

"I do not."

The self-denying ordinance of Sabbath silence became too hard to keep. The old lady broke out, "You know perfectly well that Mr. Tillingfleet said that, if this Bill was given a retrospective character, you would have to be Mr. Challis's wife aga'in, and live with him, whether you liked it or not."

"I don't recollect that he said any such thing. I don't believe he *did*."

"You can get his letter and look at it, if you doubt your mother's word on Sunday." This was not an admis-

sion of fibs on week-days ; it referred to the intensification of unfiliality as a Sabbath vice. The speaker closed her eyes and began saying nothing about the subject again, in fulfilment of her manifesto.

Marianne ran her eyes over the scanty fringe of letters stuck in the mirror-frame over the chimney-piece. Mr. Tillingfleet's business handwriting was soon found. "He *does* say no such thing," said she, after reading it to herself. "What he says is absolutely and entirely different."

"I am corrected. When you are quiet once more, perhaps you will kindly tell me *what* he says?"

"Grandmamma, I tell you plainly it is no use trying to make me out in a temper, because I'm not. . . ."

"Go on. I am accustomed to being snapped at."

"I shall not go on if you talk like that."

"I have no wish to hear the letter again. Don't read it if you don't want to. I know perfectly well what's in it." The venerable lady then murmured to herself, most offensively, "Three little Liver Pills." It was one of her practices to sketch correctives for controversial opponents, the doses increasing in proportion to the degree of diversity of opinion.

Marianne, armed with a combative immobility of face and monotony of accent, read aloud from Mr. Tillingfleet's letter. "'The retrospective action of the measure now before Parliament will, if carried, seriously affect the relations of Sir Alfred Challis and your daughter. It will undoubtedly determine the technical legitimacy of their children, and give their *de facto* father a legal right to their guardianship.' There!" says Marianne in conclusion, replacing the letter in the looking-glass.

But her mother rallies her forces with asperity against the assumptions of this monosyllable, saying enigmatically that she is "not going to be 'there'd.' " It is ridiculous, she says, to pretend that she said that Mr. Tillingfleet said there was anything in the Bill to compel anyone to do anything. But, for all that, Marianne would have to live with her husband again, or go without her children.

Marianne walked up and down the room over this, chafing. She couldn't believe such disgraceful injustice was possible. Besides, if the Bill passed ever so, Titus

would never have the meanness to take her children from her. To think that, all this year past, he could have married that girl at any moment, and then to have a right to his children !

Grandmamma said she would never be the least surprised at any freethinker committing bigamy. All freethinkers committed something, or many things, for that matter, avoiding felony from motives of policy. "He knows that his children are contrary to the Act of Parliament now, and that he's no right to them, and that's why he keeps his distance. You'll see, Marianne, that it will be quite another story if this wicked Bill passes."

"I don't believe it. Anyhow, it hasn't passed yet ! Besides, the amendment was withdrawn."

"Well !"

"Well, of course ! Then the Bill won't have a retrospective character." But the old lady was too sharp to fall into this topsy-turvy view of the case, and presently succeeded in convincing her daughter of her mistake. However, Perplexity was only scotched, not killed. "Suppose Titus had married this girl already, I mean, and the Bill passes, which of us would be his wife ? I don't see how any amount of retrospects could unmarry *them*." Thus Marianne ; and her mother can't meet the difficulty off-hand.

But consideration lights on a solution. "It would make your children legitimate, and he would claim them," says she, with the sort of glee in ambush people feel over a fellow-creature caught in a legal man-trap.

But Marianne's short sight is often clear sight. "What rubbish !" says she. "If Miss Arkroyd had a baby. . . . No !—I don't care, Grandmamma. She wouldn't be Titus's wife really, if she married him at all the churches in London, and you know it. . . . Yes !—I say again, if she had a baby, Titus would have two legitimate families at once, and she would be his Law-wife, and I shouldn't. It's silly !"

Those who read the Debates on this question at the time—it is not so long ago all this happened—will remember that arguments akin to this one of Marianne's repulsed the forlorn hopes of the Bill's opponents, and clinched its



retrospective character. What has happened to women who had married their sister's husbands, and been superseded by a "lawful" wife, before the passing of this Bill, the story knows not. Have the husbands been convicted of retrospective bigamy?

But this story has little more concern with the intricacies of difficult legislation in this matter than with those that have arisen in any other coercion by Law of the private lives of the non-aggressive classes. It is hopeless, apparently, to look forward to a day when the guiding rule of the law-giver will be non-interference with all but molestation; but one may indulge in satisfaction at each removal from the Statute Book of an enactment that infringes it.

Marianne's last speech, recorded above, shows a curious frame of mind. She had thrust her husband away from her in a fit of jealousy—not an ill-grounded one, by any means—and had bolstered up her conscience by what she more than half suspected to be a false pretext; but one in which she felt sure of the support of Grundydom in Great Britain, *passim*. How if this new legislation, or abrogation of old legislation, should undermine the fortress of her powerful allies, and leave a small and unconsidered band of bigots to fight the battle of an imaginary consanguinity? Those are not the words of her mind—only the gist of her thought. What she said to herself was that now there was to be an Act of Parliament everyone would go round the other way. To her that included the thought that the old catchwords that had done duty for so long would begin to ring false when brought into collision with that powerful agency, a Parliamentary majority. Since she had been dwelling so constantly on the subject she had more than once found herself face to face with impeachments of well-worn arguments derived from Scripture; notably when she found that one Biblical denunciation treated of marriage with a woman who might have one day become her husband's Deceased Wife's Sister, but who would not have been so when he married her, unless he had waited for that *sine qua non*, his wife's death. Thoughts of this sort strengthened and multiplied as the time drew nearer for this Parliamentary discussion, and here was the Bill apparently going to become Law, and by a back-

handed thrust to make her Titus's "Law-wife" again, as well as what her own heart in some mysterious way proclaimed her to be—namely, his *real* wife, whatever that meant! She was certainly in a very curious, confused, self-contradictory frame of mind, was Marianne.

Perhaps her contradiction and confusion had never been much greater than on this Sunday afternoon, where the story has left her for so long, feverishly pacing up and down the room, after puzzling her poor stupid head trying to follow the Debate, and make some sense of it. She had succeeded in finding out that the Bill was nearly through Parliament, and that it would affect her and Titus more than she had conceived possible hitherto. She was working herself up into a state of bitten lips and sobs kept in abeyance. Her mother was not the person to encourage this sort of thing. "If you must prowl, Marianne" said she, "can't you go and prowl somewhere else?"

Her daughter may have shown her state of mind; for as she returned to her sofa, her amiable mother added, "If you are going to sniff and make a scene, Marianne, you had better have the children down." The old woman was sitting with her eyes shut, and really had very slight data to go on.

"Whatever Titus was, at least he wasn't unkind!" said Marianne tartly. But she touched the bell-handle, and its sound was followed by the prompt appearance of Mumps and Chobbles, now no longer known by those names, which had been to some extent their father's private property. The younger child came into the room shouting, with jumps as emphasis, "Now we may have the Thunday papers to make boats of, long ones and short ones."

The construction of a Navy had been a great *pièce de résistance* at the Hermitage in old days. The vessels had weak points; notably that when the deck was flattened out on completion, the cut-water was apt to part amidships, unless firmly held together by a neighbouring shipwright, or stuck together with a pin. But this last practice was looked upon with suspicion, as hardly legitimate. The question does not arise, so far as we are aware, at Chatham or Devonport; as in no case are ships first constructed with decks analogous to the bottoms of

wine-bottles seen from within, and levelled down before launching

Traditions of bygone Dockyards naturally survived, and gave rise to controversy. Marianne was always in dread of some painful reminder of the past during ship-building. But it kept the children quiet; so, though she had not seen the whole of the paper, owing to the difficulty of analysing that Debate, she conceded it to the Contractors.

Now, a practice obtained between them quite at variance with the care and foresight usually shown in the placing of new ships on the stocks. If in any of the Government Dockyards it is common for the actual length of a ship to remain an open question until the moment of construction, it should surely be made the subject of a question in Parliament! Mumps and Chobbles, having obtained the paper, differed about the length of the first hull to be put in hand. Chobbles preferred a normal full sheet, alleging that vessels built of two sheets were only just seaworthy, owing to weakness of the backbone. Mumps was ambitious, advocating a ship of huge length, made with two full sheets. Chobbles opposed this scheme on the ground that, if pushed, such a vessel would collapse, or go scrunch. Mumps, however, had set her heart on it.

"Papa *thaid* it wouldn't go scrunch—not if we sticked it over in the middle—not if we pulled bofe the edges across—not if we doo'd like viss." Mumps ended an imperfect description with a practical demonstration of how the vessel might be strengthened in the middle if some of the length were sacrificed. "Overlap" was the word she wanted.

"Then we must have wafers," said Chobbles. Because otherwise, you see, the ship might come in half, and founder—who knows?—with all on board.

"You may have wafers if you won't quarrel," said the mother of the shipwrights. And wafers being obtained from her writing-desk, a threat of violence from Mumps was withdrawn and overlooked.

Now it so chanced that, the newspaper being large and difficult to control, Chobbles, as principal, gave instructions to Mumps to hold the two sheets the long ship was to be made from as directed, while she herself stuck the two

together, cautiously advancing across the paper on her knees. A more mature shipwright would have wafered the two corners first, and distributed the remaining wafers over the space between, so as to make the most of them. As it turned out, Mumps shifted her corner while Chobbles was yet half-way, and when Chobbles completed, dismay ensued. For the paper didn't lie straight, and all the wafers were used up. Words followed, and recriminations. Mumps maintained that she had held on to her corner loyally, unwaveringly; Chobbles that she could not have done so, because she herself had selected a passage in large type as the point Mumps was to remain faithful to. She was in a position to show that if her little sister had adhered to her instructions, the accident would not have happened.

"What are those children fighting about?" said their Grandmamma, who had fallen asleep—had been snoring, in fact—and who waked suddenly. "It all comes, Marianne, of your letting them play on Sunday afternoon. When I was a child I should have been writing out the sermon, and well whipped if I couldn't recollect it. . . ." And so forth.

"What's all that noise about, children?" said their mother. "If you can't make less I shall ring for Martha to take you back to the nursery. Be quieter!"

Chobbles plunged straight into indictment, Mumps into justification. "I said, 'Hold the corner to Motor Car,' and Mumps didn't." . . . "I *did* held it to Motor Car, and never leaved it loose one minute." . . . "You did *not* hold it to Motor Car, or it would be up against Motor Car now." . . . "Be-because you shov-oveled it all crooked, and it wors your fault and it worsn't my fault" . . . and more to the same effect, came mixed with heart-broken lamentations over the ruin of the great ship's chances; for all the wafers but two were licked and used, and the wobble of the raw material was too disheartening for any attempt to be made to rectify it.

"It just serves you right for quarrelling about it," said Grandmamma savagely, taking a mean advantage of the difficulties youth has in convicting maturity of defective reasoning. "And it serves *you* right, Marianne, for

letting the children have the horrible things at all." She went on to point out that all the benefit of Afternoon Service was lost if contact with such profanities was permitted afterwards.

Meanwhile Marianne, painfully conscious that in these days she could not say, as of old, "What would your father say if he heard you quarrel like that?"—for fear of complications—went to the children, still at daggers drawn over the newspaper on the floor, to make an official investigation of the facts.

Did not the story note, a page ago, that she had altogether missed a sheet of the paper? She had, and it was an important one; the one containing the very Latest Intelligence and Stop-the-press News. And the words "Motor Car," chosen by Chobbles as a finger-guide for her small sister, formed part of the following piece of Latest Intelligence:—"Fatal Motor-Car Accident.—An accident, which has already caused one death, and which it is feared may have other fatal results, occurred yesterday morning at Royd, in Rankshire, close to the seat of Sir Murgatroyd Arkroyd, Bart., some years since Member for the County. The car, the property of Lord Felixthorpe, Sir Murgatroyd's son-in-law, was turning a sharp corner near the picturesque and interesting spot known as 'The Abbey Well,' when the deceased, a man known as 'Blind Jim,' stepped incautiously into the middle of the road, so suddenly that the promptest action of the chauffeur in his application of the brake could not avert a catastrophe. Unfortunately, as the car swerved, one of its occupants, a gentleman whose name had not transpired at the moment of writing, rose to his feet in his apprehension that a mishap was impending, and was thrown violently into the road, falling on his head. He was conveyed to Royd Hall insensible, but we understand that hopes are confidently entertained of his recovery. We are glad to be able to add that the lady who was the other occupant of the car, Miss Judith Arkroyd, the eldest daughter of Sir Murgatroyd, had the good fortune to sustain no injury beyond the inevitable shock attendant on so tragic an occurrence." Jim's death was rather taken for granted in this paragraph; no doubt the wire on which it was founded had felt the

greater importance of the motorists. No one ever knew who sent it. In such cases, no one ever does.

The overlap amidships just hid all but the first three lines; and when Marianne examined it, with a view to remedying the miscarriage, she attached no more importance to "Fatal Motor Accident," in large capitals, than to any other mishaps the newspaper world gets killed in. There are always accidents! But in the course of a laborious detachment of the last two or three wafers, to be employed in reconstruction if gummy enough, the words "Royd in Rankshire" were uncovered, and caught her eye.

"Stop, children! -don't fuss and worry. I want to read this.... Royd Hall in Rankshire."... The last words were said to herself in relief of thought, not as information for the children, who didn't matter.

"What's that about Royd in Rankshire?" Grandmamma waked suddenly, and put a good deal of side on her snarl, provisionally, not knowing how much acrimony might turn out to be needed.

"Wait till I've read it, and I'll tell you."

"Oh, don't tell me if you don't like. It's no concern of mine." Nevertheless, Marianne, after reading through the paragraph to herself—during which the old lady affected perusal of a sermon—took her anxiety to hear for granted, and read it through aloud. It met with the comment:

"I suppose that's what you grunted at, the first time?"

"Suppose what's what I grunted at... oh! 'had the good fortune to sustain no injury,' do you mean? Well, Grandmamma, I suppose you wouldn't expect me to cry my eyes out if..."

"If 'handsome Judith' got her beauty spoiled—is that it?"

"I shouldn't cry my eyes out. I wonder who her other gentleman was, in the car! I'm glad it wasn't Titus, at any rate."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, mamma, how can you be such a fool, when Bob heard from his father only yesterday, at that place in Derbyshire; he got the letter this morning." Bob had been at Broadstairs a week at this date, and, in pursuance

of a policy of avoiding his grandmother on Sundays, when she was liable to malignant forms of piety, had started early in the day to walk to Canterbury—his beloved Tillotson was staying there with an ecclesiastical relative—where he would stop the night, and whence he would walk back next day, accompanied probably by Tillotson. Well!—it was only eighteen miles!

Marianne was as sure that her husband was safe, leagues away from Royd Hall, yesterday morning, as she was that she had packed off Bob with sandwiches and cake after an early breakfast twelve hours ago, and that he and Tillotson were enjoying Choral Services and Purple Emperors alternately to their hearts' content. She was satisfied—not reasonably; but then, it was comfortable to be unreasonable—that he had posted the letter as soon as it was written; and as it reached on Sunday, it was posted on Saturday. What could be clearer?

She was so comfortable about it that she re-read the paragraph once or twice, not quite without a kindling hope that Miss Arkroyd's motoring about with a gentleman unnamed might "mean something"—mean something, that is, that would end the chapter of Titus's admiration for, or "connection with," Miss Arkroyd. It didn't matter which you called it.

One thing was clear enough. The injured man was a stranger to the purveyor of the news; not the owner of the car, just mentioned, nor any other of the *habitués* of Royd Hall, all of whom would be well-known in the neighbourhood. Oh yes!—that was all right. She hoped, however, that if he was an aspirant to Miss Arkroyd's hand, he was not seriously damaged, so as to diminish his probabilities of success. As for "Blind Jim," she was sorry for him, with a general feeling that "handsome Judith" was responsible for his mishap, but without any definite recollection of him. She may never have heard him mentioned at all, for Mrs. Steptoe was not communicative about her brother; and although Challis had certainly made Lizarann's acquaintance before Marianne left her home, it was only on that last day of his abruptly terminated visit to Royd. And that was all ancient history by now.

She resumed the reconstruction question quite at ease

in her mind ; if anything, with a sense of something not unpleasant having happened. Further search yielded two or three more wafers, and the ship was completed and launched. But the resistance, to shearing-force, of the bolts that held the fore and aft parts together had not been properly calculated. A dissension between the owners led to an attempt to drag her two ways at once, and—to use very un-nautical language—she gave at the wafers. Mumps, seized with despair, was told that if she roared and stamped, she shouldn't be allowed to make ships at all ; and her mother, to show that she was in earnest, picked up the shattered vessel, and proceeded to re-embody it as the Sunday paper. But a something caught her eye, and she read again.

A moment after Grandmamma, rousing herself wrathfully, exclaimed, " What is all this horrible noise about ? Those children had better go upstairs. I tell you they *shall go*, Marianne ; I won't have the noise any longer !" and began pulling the bell to summon Martha, the nurse. She must have taken a sound that came from her daughter for protest or remonstrance ; for she stormed on, heedless that the voice of the two children had changed from mere unruliness to terror. " It's no use your saying ' yow,' because I tell you I won't have it. On Sunday afternoon, too ! . . . *What ?*" She turned furiously, but her fury gave place to alarm as she caught sight of her daughter, ashy white, gasping to speak, but speechless ; clutching with one hand the paper that had been the ship, pointing to something in it with the other.

Then Marianne found a voice, or a voice she hardly knew as her own, to cry out chokingly, " Oh, Titus, Titus !—dying !" She relinquished the paper to her mother, saying, " Oh yes—here !—oh, here ! Look, look ! . . ." still pointing, and then covering her eyes, with a cry of despair : " He is dying—dying ! Oh, children, children, your father will die, and I shall not be beside him !"

" You fool !" said the old lady. " Don't go on like a mad thing. Before the children !" She was scared, but it must be admitted she showed discipline. " You might at least be quiet while I read it. . . . No !—*Wait*, Martha ! . . . can't you see ? . . . you servants never *can* see . . ."



She took the paper to the window—for the light was failing—and read to herself. After a minute, she said abruptly, "Ho!" and then *sotto voce*, "He'll die in her arms, at any rate." And then this venerable woman—let us hope with an affectation of indifference to the fate of her son-in-law, contrived something nearly approaching a snigger as an accompaniment to the remark, aloud, "He won't die! You needn't fret yourself. Handsome Judith will see that he's properly doctored up." Leniency might have supposed this an attempt to strengthen her daughter against her trouble by appealing to her resentment. If so, it was an impolitic one. For Marianne, apparently as a response, said decisively, "I shall go to him at once," and seemed to mean it.

"Don't be an idiot! You can't pay for your ticket. You haven't any money, and I shan't give you any." But it seemed that Marianne had money, so this attempt to hinder her departure only hastened it. She was not one to submit to coercion tamely. To be brief, she put a few necessaries in a bag, hugged her children well, consoling them as best she could; begged that the news should be kept from Bob till more was known—for this Marianne, with all her faults, had a strong leaven of family affection—and caught the quick train for London.

She would have travelled all night had there been a train. As it was, she was up very early at the Hotel, got a poor breakfast, and left Euston by the first express, before eight o'clock struck. Would Titus be alive on her arrival?

For the item of "Stop-the-press News" that had caught her eye, and thrown a light on the paragraph she had just read, ran as follows: "Name of gentleman thrown from motor-car yesterday morning at Royd, Sir Alfred Challis, well-known author and playwright; condition precarious, but not despaired of."

In the greatest stress of trouble absurd thoughts hang about like imps, and vex one with their insignificance. All through that five hours' rail Marianne was plagued with the question:—Suppose those people chose to address her as "Lady Challis," what should she do?

## CHAPTER LI

It was on a Saturday, the twenty-fourth of August, that Alfred Challis met with his mishap, at half-past nine in the morning. It was not till eight o'clock on Monday that he began to regain consciousness, very slowly, having been nearly forty-eight hours speechless, and seemingly insensible.

Experience tends to show that in most cases of recovery from coma, whether the cause be traumatic or otherwise, the first memories that present themselves are those of the last events of which the patient has been conscious. With Challis it was otherwise. During his stupor he had forgotten, apparently, all about his accident—about what led to it—about Royd Hall, his infatuation for Judith, his wife's desertion. Nothing of the story of the past year-and-a-half was left when he first became aware that he was in a strange room, lying on luxurious pillows, with a great deal of bandage on his head and a great deal of pain inside it. What must seem strangest of all was that he had forgotten Judith herself!

For Judith, whose communications with her family will be easiest explained later, had been roused before her usual calling-time by her little maid, Cintilla, who announced joyously that if Judith pleased, miss, Sir Alfred Challis had spoken. "Did he ask for me?" said the young lady. But Cintilla couldn't say. The nurse didn't hear words. A nurse had been got from Grime on the Saturday afternoon.

"Ask the nurse not to talk to anyone else till I can come," said Judith. Then she scrambled into some clothes and a *peignoir*, and went straight to his bedside.

"My little Cintilla said Sir Alfred Challis had spoken, Miss O'Connor, but that you couldn't make out what he said?"

"Oh yes—I'm quite sure he spoke. But I shouldn't like to swear to the words, Miss Arkroyd."

"But short of swearing to them... you've an impression?"

"Yes—but I think it must have been a mistaken one. I thought what he said was 'Polly Anne.'... Perhaps there's some one?"

The story has more than once spoken of Judith Arkroyd's splendid nerve and powers of self-control—at least, against all moral disturbing forces. On this occasion the perfect self-possession with which she said, "Oh yes!—he was speaking of his wife," would have done credit to Julius Cæsar or Napoleon.

The nurse showed by a perfectly natural question her absolute unsuspicion of a fox under the cloak. "Had Lady Challis far to come?" For she must have been sent for—that saw itself.

"We don't know—I mean, we don't know where Lady Challis is. When Sir Alfred comes to himself, he will tell us.... Is he not speaking again?" Yes, he was. Both listened. Judith was reflective a moment over what to do; then said: "Would you kindly knock at my father's door, and say we think Sir Alfred is coming to himself? Or tell James to tell him." The nurse thinks to herself: "More obvious, surely, for this young lady to hunt up her father, and leave the patient to me!" But Judith, seeing hesitation, suggests a motive. When Sir Alfred opens his eyes he may be alarmed to find himself alone with a professional nurse. Also, Judith is always authoritative.

She seemed half-frightened of the patient, left alone with him. Would not you, woman, who are reading this, have taken the hand of the man if you loved him? Did Judith love him? She did not take his hand. Do you find her inexplicable? She was not really so; it is only the story's want of skill that makes her seem so. Then, think of the conflict of feeling and motive under her circumstances.... However, let that wait!

Perhaps it was as well that she did not take his hand. Possibly what she did and said was safest, all things considered. She remained standing, immovable as a statue, by the bedside, and when his eyes opened and turned to her,

more in enquiry than astonishment or alarm, said simply, "Well?" and waited for speech to come from him.

"Are you real?" said Challis. Her white, scared look and seeming shrinking from him grew more marked. His words, creepy and uncanny all the more that their speaker uttered them so equably, made her fear his reason had given way. Even those who have loved one demented will shrink from his insanity. But she kept her self-command, and replied with a voice under control:

"Scroop—do you not know me? I am Judith."

"Judith?"

"Yes—Judith Arkroyd. Do you not remember?"

"Judith Arkroyd—yes—a—oh yes!" There was an amiable air about him of a wish to be civil—an evasive acquiescence he might have shown to an attractive lady he had met in Society, and now met again and took the word of for her identity. He would talk a little, and something in the conversation would soon remind him whom he was speaking to. That sort of thing! His provisional pretence of recognition was more convincing a thousand times of his forgetfulness than any amount of denial of it would have been.

What could Judith do? Attack the position at once? Say to him: "Try to think! Try to recall all our love-passages of this year past! Remember the little garden in the moonlight, and your arms you found it so hard to restrain within the rules of good-breeding! Remember your mad, hot outburst, and your flight from an *enticement* you found insupportable; your quarrel with your wife; your troth-plight and mine; the tension of that Bill question. And last and most, or worst, that automobile and the man ahead, already as good as slain! Think of any of these things, and surely you will remember that this is I, Judith, that was to have been your wife!" All that this man must have forgotten, to forget *her*, rushed through Judith's mind, to take form in words should she nerve herself to utter it, or any choice from it. But the next thing he said clashed so ruthlessly with the last of her thought that speech on those lines was made hopeless.

"My head aches so confoundedly that I feel quite an idiot, and can't think of anything. But I can see one

thing—some one is being very kind to me. I think if my wife were to come she would be able to thank you for me. Is she not here? Can she not be got? My wife Polly Anne?"

Yes—the barrier of his utter lack of recognition could not be surmounted yet, if ever. She must accept the rôle of a stranger; for now, certainly—perhaps for good. Luckily, he had closed his eyes as his voice grew fainter with his effort, and died out on his last word. She fought bravely against the tremulousness of her own to say: "We do not know where to send to her. Can you tell us?"

"Yes—but don't frighten her. Send it as from me. Say I have had a slight accident—that is it, I suppose? . . ."

"Yes, you have had an accident—a fall."

" . . . And am doing perfectly well. Mind you say that!"

"Oh yes—that shall be worded all right. But where are we to send?"

"Number eighty-three—I think it's number eighty-three—Great Coram Street." Again his great effort to speak overcame him; and, though he got through the last words plainly, they ended in a groan. Then Judith heard her father coming, and the nurse, and left the room to meet him. The nurse passed on into the room, but Sir Murgatroyd stopped to speak with his daughter. He looked ill and harassed, and his age was visible on him. The last two days had tried him, no doubt!

"They say Sir Alfred has spoken. Is that so?"

"Yes—he has been speaking to me. But, oh—papa—papa! . . ." It stopped him dead to hear the distress in her voice.

"Yes, dear child, what? Tell me—tell me all! . . ." It took her a moment to choke down a sob, and then it came.

"He does not know who I *am*—he does not *know* me." There is such a thing as a whisper, as well as a cry, of pain, and Judith's strong resolve of self-control curbed her last words down to one. Her father, as he took her in his arms, felt how she was trembling with the shock of her upset. She had borne the effects of the motor accident better than this.

The old gentleman kissed her tenderly, calling her by an

old pet name he sometimes used. "Dear girl, dear Jujube," said he. "I am afraid you loved this man."

She seemed to recoil from this placing of the fact on record. "That is all over now," said she stonily. "But you are a dear good papa"; and kissed him in return affectionately. He seemed relieved, and said: "But now you will tell me all about it." She replied: "I will. All!" And then her mother came, in haste, and all went together into Challis's room. But previous exertions had told upon the patient, and he was equal to no more than a few broken words of thanks, recognising no one, but somehow conscious that he was being hospitably cared for, and that his visitors were his hosts.

Up to this time Judith's family had been kept in the dark about the important fact in the story of the accident—the reason why Judith and Challis were in the motor-car at all. Each may have had his or her surmise as to the object of their rendezvous and sudden departure, but they had not conversed openly about it, so far. Sibyl had certainly said to her husband in confidence, at an hour when she supposed all the rest of the house asleep: "You'll see that I'm right, Frank! It was an elopement, pre-arranged. Fancy their meeting by accident—parcel of nonsense!" To which her husband, who was going to sleep, and not in his usual linguistic form, had replied: "Oh, gammon, Sib!" Sibyl had then adduced reasons, such as that Challis could not have been on his way to the Rectory out there near the Park Gate; that the Duchess at least knew nothing of any appointment for Judith to come to the Castle at an hour which, according to her Grace, was "almost yesterday"; and that, most of all, M. Fossier had said Sir Alfred had a map in his pocket. What did Sir Alfred want with a map unless they were going a long distance? But his Lordship was not listening, and her Ladyship convicted him of it, and then both their ships went to sleep.

All this makes one see Judith, and how each member of her family, without being exactly afraid of her, left the elucidation of the mystery to the others. But behind a natural reluctance to belling the cat—though the metaphor is no doubt exaggerated—lay the feeling that the truth

might work out as tragedy; the facts might contain the germs of heart-break. Silence certainly had its recommendations. Besides, explanation was inevitable in the end; so why analyse and probe now, with the uncertainty still hanging over us whether this gentleman would live or die; and the other uncertainty as to whether the inquest to-morrow would absolve the motor-car, or find that poor Jim had been the victim of its gross carelessness. Its owner was feeling bound to make a fight for its chauffeur, but he had told M. Fossier his mind as plainly as his French would permit.

As for poor Jim's death, there was no lack of perfectly honest and heart-felt sorrow for the tragical disaster on the part of any member of the family, except Judith. She said nothing, certainly; but surely it was a case in which a stony silence was ungraceful? However, her mother and sister let her go her own way. She was Judith!—and would be so to the end of the chapter.

Meanwhile it was a serious grief to the Baronet and Lord Felixthorpe, shared to a great extent by their respective wives, that poor Jim had left no family that would have been open to endowment or adoption. When Athelstan Taylor, arriving late on Saturday evening with Mr. Brownrigg, who had remained on at the Rectory, brought the full particulars of Jim's death, he had also the unpleasant task of crushing out all the plans Sir Murgatroyd and his wife were forming for Lizarann's benefit. They had all but adopted her in anticipation; indeed, a sort of competition for possession of the child had arisen between them and their son-in-law. But, alas!—poor little Lizarann, or the shell she had left, lay dead in the sound of the sea that was to have done her so much good. It was a cruel disappointment to Sir Murgatroyd.

The Rector's surmises, which he kept to himself, about the true story of the motor-car and Challis's meeting with Judith, were based on fuller information than the Baronet's. He was quite satisfied in his own mind that the pair had resolved to anticipate the retrospective operation of the measure before Parliament by constituting themselves legally man and wife, and making its action in their case impossible. He knew Challis's disposition was towards

taking this step; and while he was far from having the heart to say, "Serve him right!" of the man who, when he went up to his bedside and touched him and spoke to him, lay dead and irresponsible—perhaps never to speak again—still, he could not but feel that in that man's place he would soonest have taken his chance of some possible reasonable operation of Law later on. Failing which he would—so he thought—have borne his lot courageously as in any other case where Duty bars the road that Inclination beckons us to take. But, then, how about that awkward thought—what right would he have had to prescribe his own high moralities to a woman whose sole crime would have been that she loved him? "Judge not, that ye be not judged," said he to himself, as he turned from the impassive figure on the bed. You see, he *had* never been under fire on that battle-field! But, whatever he thought, he said not a word of it to the Baronet or the Family, and he purposely avoided speech apart with Judith. He looked forward, by preference, to hearing the first explanation from Challis himself.

The doctor came and went—saw no danger—anticipated early return of consciousness—would not oppose Sir Murgatroyd wiring for Sir Rhyscombe Edison, if he thought it necessary; but he did not see, neither did a colleague, summoned from Grime to consult, what Sir Rhyscombe could say more than "Wait with patience!" Apparently there was no depression of the cranium, and certainly there was no fracture. Still, it was all for their interest that Sir Rhyscombe should come; the less responsibility for himself and Dr. Shaw Cox, the better for them! Sir Murgatroyd consented to let the wire he had written stand over till next day, though he nearly went back on his word when his wife said: "Just consider!—a two hundred pound fee!" As far as that went, he would have wired for the whole College of Surgeons if he had thought it his duty, and taken his chance of the workhouse.

Mr. Brownrigg the Grauboschite found his visit very different from what he had anticipated; and, indeed, felt himself very much *de trop*. He had been in the habit of regarding places like Royd Hall from their guest-recipient point of view—a kind of gratuitous taverns, or hydro-



pathic establishments, rather, of a refined sort; where, provided always that he behaved sweetly, and tipped the servants liberally, all the currents of Life were to run smooth, and troubles be unknown. But this sudden inroad of Death and Misadventure had changed all that; and while he had to acknowledge to himself that his affection for his hosts had grown much greater since they became, as it were, human as well as merely opulent and amiable, he could not shut his eyes to the fact that the character of his visit had completely changed. Still less could he shut his eyes to that other fact—that he really wasn't wanted. Least of all when he found grounds for suspecting that his hostess was writing to put off other guests! He mooted the suggestion, with all due roundabouting, that he should return to his rooms at Cambridge to-morrow, and come another time.

But he was so sorry for himself that the Rector saw it, and good-naturedly suggested to Mr. Brownrigg that he should pay him a visit at the Rectory for a day or two before going home. Lady Murgatroyd had only postponed her house-party for a few days, just till all these troubles should blow over; and then, who knew but what Sir Alfred Challis would at least be well enough to be moved before the end of the week? Mr. Brownrigg accepted the invitation *con amore*.

And then, throughout a very cheerless and oppressed Sunday, slightly alleviated by callers, things went on without change. Judith scarcely left her room, and was reticent. Very little allusion was made to yesterday's events by the other members of the family in conversation with one another. It rarely went beyond an enquiry whether Challis had shown any sign of consciousness. None of the family appeared at Church—a very rare event in the annals of Royd.

Towards Judith the attitude of her mother and sister was a perfectly indescribable compromise between toleration and exasperation, good-will towards a blood relation in difficulties, and condemnation without benefit of clergy, all kept in abeyance pending illumination. Probably the freest speech on the matter was Lady Arkroyd's to the Duchess, when the latter, having been told all the facts in

full, asked in her brief, incisive way—which none but a Duchess could have resorted to without seeming questionable form, dear!—"What were they up to, Therèse? That's the point!" and her ladyship replied: "Oh, of course we all know perfectly well, Thyringia. Only nobody's to say anything. They were going to take the wind out of the sails of this precious new bit of legislation by going through a ceremony, at any rate. . . ."

"I see. A honeymoon under protest. I suppose Judith would have come back here and said nothing about it?"

"My dear, I really won't undertake to say what Judith would or wouldn't have done. She would have had to come back for her things, anyhow!"

Thyringia looked amused. Perhaps she was canvassing in her mind the sorry plight of a thingless bride. Many complications would suggest themselves to the mind of a Duchess of experience. "Not so much as a tooth-brush, poor girl!" said she. "However, she could have bought *that* at any chemist's shop. What are you going to do?"

"Why should we do anything? If that Bill passes. . . ."

"My dear, it was through Committee in the Lords on Friday afternoon. The Bishop will be black in the face with rage. I shall see him in a day or two, and be able to twit him. Poor Dr. Barham! . . . But I don't see that there can be any marrying now—not till this Sir Alfred gets a divorce. . . . Can he?"

"No; he has the most exasperating wife. She is his wife now, or will be on Tuesday, if Murgatroyd is right! And she's quite *sans reproche*, as I understand. Isn't it a nuisance?"

"Do you *want* Judith to marry this man, Therèse?"

"My dear!—is it likely? But if the girl has set her heart on him, it is a nuisance to have him married to a woman who won't commit anything and make it possible. . . ."

"Couldn't he force her to divorce him by. . . ?"

"By committing something himself? Oh no!—she's too sharp for that. Of course, she wants to pay them out, and make it all as uncomfortable as possible. I'm sorry

for Judith, but I must say it's a great deal her own fault. Oh dear!—why *cannot* people be ordinary and reasonable? Hush!—there she is. . . .”

At the sound of an identifying skirt-rustle descending the stairs, the Duchess dropped her voice to say reflectively: “Yes—why can't the woman misbehave herself, and be hanged to her?” She was silent by the time the rustle reached the door. It was Judith, self-possessed, but pallid, who met a cautious half-approach to the burning subject of the day with, “Now do, dear Duchess, be a good woman, and *don't* ask me questions now. I'm coming over to-morrow, and I'll tell you *all* about it. . . . No, really, I can't tell you about it now, if I try; it only makes my head go round.”

On which her Grace, telegraphed to aside by slightly raised eyebrows and an almost unperceptible shrug of Lady Arkroyd's shoulders, that seemed to mean, “You see?—Judith all over. I told you!” merged enquiry in mere commiseration. Oh no—*she* wasn't going to catechize and be odious. Poor child! How ill she was looking! And no wonder! It was all so dreadful. But, at any rate, she, Judith, was not to blame for this terrible mishap. No one would ever believe *that*!

“I'm not so sure even of that myself,” said the young lady wearily. And the Duchess made a mental note that this girl really looked her loveliest in trouble. But this girl did not intend to *s'appuyer* on the topic. She had only come in just to say a word of greeting, and that she would come over to Thanet to-morrow. And now she must go and lie down, for her head was simply splitting. No; she knew Mr. Taylor was in the next room with the others, but she couldn't stay to talk even to him. Her mother must make her apologies. For this was in what was regarded as the confidential room of the house—the little cabinet off the first staircase landing, with the suite of buhl furniture that belonged to Cardinal Richelieu, or somebody, and the cinquecento Milanese armour, made for Galeazzo Sforza, who was a Monster of Iniquity. It was always spoken of as “the *mezzanina* room.”

This may be enough to make it understood how a complete revelation of the circumstances preceding the acci-

dent was still to be made, two days after its occurrence ; although pretty shrewd guesses of their general nature were afloat. It was with a sense of relief that Sir Murgatroyd said to his wife, as they came away from Challis's side, satisfied that, for the present at least, his revived powers of speech had lapsed, "Judith has promised to tell me the whole." And it was with a sense of relief that her mother heard him. For the doubt of what story might be still to come was more painful than any probable certainty would have been.

Down in the village and round the Abbey Well, and round Mrs. Fox's cottage and its tenant lying dead, survivors of the Feudal System hung about in groups, and spoke their pristine mother-tongue, an institution that has not been Americanised in Royd, so far. If that tenant's sub-tenant, the victim or *bénéficiaire* of a recent writ of ejectment, was also hanging about, unseen owing to the Nature of Things, he must have lamented the pain he was giving, and the trouble his survivors were having with his residuum. Our interpretation of Jim Coupland's character favours that view, granting the needful assumptions. But, of course, he may have been extinct, whatever that means. Poor Jim !

## CHAPTER LII

A SLEEPLESS night had preceded that interview between Judith and Challis, and she was not at her best when his wandering speech and cold unrecognition struck a chill to her soul. When a like event occurs—and it does chance, now and again—between folk who have been linked together for a lifetime, and when the uninjured survivor, awaiting with the return of consciousness the accents and look of affection of a few hours ago, is disheartened by the insensate stare of eyes that only see a stranger, the unimpassioned sound of a voice from which all tenderness has vanished, even then the trial is a hard one. But the memory of the past years is too strong to allow belief that the thing will last—it is dismissed as a passing nightmare, as the nurse by the bedside of fever dismisses the wanderings of delirium. It will last its time, and pass away and be forgotten.

A cool judgment and more experience might have told the girl to bear her soul in patience; to treat the wanderings of a brain shaken as Challis's had been as mere sleep-waking. But even had her self-possession been at its best, she had no long-past years of love to look back to, to give her confidence in its return with a returning calm of health. And not only this, but these same wandering words of his had shown how full his soul still was of the past in which she had no share. She had been allowed a peep into her lover's heart, and had felt the force of another love's preoccupation of it. If only his utterances had been stark rambling, mere Tom-of-Bedlam incoherence! But the worst of it was, their outward form was clothed in such a terrible sanity.

There was one thing in it that hit very hard—had a special sting of its own. Judith knew perfectly well about Challis's by-gones. He had taken her into his confidence

about the humble home of the days of his obscurity. His half-humorous reviews of his past had shown her plainly how little hold his first wife Kate—the “Zis” of his novel—had ever had upon him. He had evidently wedded the wrong sister first. He spoke of Bob’s mother with affection, certainly, but it was an affection that was artificial and perfunctory, whereas, even if he had never been passionately in love with Polly Anne—if no volcanic eruption had ever raged on account of this young person, whom Judith would have classed as an insignificant puss—still, that Deceased Wife’s Sister seemed to have generated something that was at least a very good working substitute for a *grande passion*. What was the worth of all his protestations to her, Judith, if this memory of the days of Great Coram Street was to be the first resurrection of his mind from its temporary death?

But where was the use of answering the question now? Or any question at all, for that matter? Was not the last chance gone of passing the barrier that held them apart? Well—she had kept her share of the compact. “I am ready, if it can be arranged,” she had said. And she had complied with every arrangement, stipulating only that the wedding was to be a mere legal precaution—a formal bar to the creation of a new obstacle by a retrospective mood of the Lords and Commons. It would keep the position unaltered; and that was only fair-play, surely! But now all was changed. She had always been alive to the fact that Marianne *in esse*, legally warranted in the appropriation of her husband’s children, and canonically warranted in her paroxysm of sensitiveness to consanguinity, was a very different force to reckon with from Marianne *in posse*, sained and assoilzied by an Act of Parliament.

Did she, we may wonder, ask herself the question: If it were possible, even at this eleventh hour, to get that knot officially tied, and be ready to laugh at the “retrospective action” of the measure that would be the Law of the Land in forty-eight hours, would she be ready to jump at the opportunity? Or, was she not rather relieved at the turn things had taken? However, there was this to be considered:—if the motor accident had not happened,

and the wedding had come off, she would never have had to face that blank stare of oblivion, and Great Coram Street! Some women won't marry a widower lest too many tender memories should still be treasured in some secret corner of his heart. That is unreasonable; because the source of them is supposed to be underground, or in Heaven, or in Purgatory, according to the *à-con-de-parler* of the moment. But... Great Coram Street! And the Deceased Wife's Sister still undeceased, and to be legalised retrospectively on Wednesday! Be it noted, though, that this is only conjecture! The story has no warrant for saying that any such thought crossed Judith's mind.

She made a clean breast of the whole matter to her father. She told him all about that last interview of hers with Challis at Trout Bend three or four weeks since; and of the arrangement they had made, and confirmed by subsequent correspondence. Challis was to reside for fifteen days at some place far enough from his or her ordinary residence to insure practical secrecy, where there was a parish-priest qualified to receive his affidavit and issue an ordinary marriage-licence. "I forget what he called him," said Judith. "Something like Harrogate." No doubt it was "surrogate." If in Challis's judgment the passing of the Bill should be put beyond reasonable doubt, he was at once to procure this licence, and make every necessary arrangement, keeping her fully informed. He had at first intended to procure a special licence, but had been deterred by some one telling him that such a licence might be refused, or at least delayed. He preferred the idea of dealing with a country parson with whom he could make acquaintance, and to whose local charities he could subscribe liberally. Besides, he could mesmerise that parson. You can't mesmerise Doctor's Commons.

The young lady then narrated, almost more graphically than seemed quite canny under her circumstances, her reception of a telegram the previous evening, fixing the time and place of their meeting in accordance with the terms of a letter of her own, which had told how her brother-in-law had placed the automobile at her disposal. She described the meeting at the Park Gate, minus its

salutations; the rapid spin along the mile of road, till they reached the curve; Challis's appeal to the chauffeur for caution, and M. Fossier's contemptuous disregard; the sudden appearance of Jim as the car whirled round the corner; and how Challis, springing to his feet, was shot straight into the road at the very moment when she knew well, although her eyes had left him, that Jim was under the wheels; and then her own dazed condition, that almost grew to stupor as she rode back; and her arrival at home, when her mother, brought out by Elphinstone, simply ran back terrified. The Baronet suspected a shade of exaggeration here, and headed off an indictment of his wife for panic.

"But *why* the motor-car at all?" said he.

"We turned it all over," said the young lady, "and could see no other way. The railway was out of the question. . . ."

"Why?"

"Well—picture me to yourself, meeting a swarm of locals on the platform at Furnival. And fancy my asking for the carriage! Where should I have said I was going? You've no idea, papa dear, what a poor liar I am! Not because I'm truthful, but because I'm stupid. Anyhow, we had taken the trains for granted; and when it came to Bradshaw, we found that to get to this obscure place and back would mean eight hours. And what was worst was that if there had been any accident or delay I should have been stranded till next day—at the Hare and Hounds I believe it would have been, as a matter of fact—and that wouldn't have suited me at all. . . ."

"Yes—yes—you were quite right. How long was it to take with the motor?"

"Within five hours, all told. An hour and three-quarters of car each way. If all had gone well. . . ."

"Why did Sir Alfred Challis come to meet you?"

Judith didn't seem over-clear on this point. "He made believe," she said, "that he thought we should lose the way. But I don't believe that was it. I believe the fun of the ride had more to do with it than anything."

The Baronet seemed a little *froissé* by something in his daughter's tone. "It has been a sorry piece of fun for him," said he. "And for you, too, my girl." For he was



almost vexed with himself for allowing the inception of a thought of condemnation. See how much she must have suffered, this fool of a daughter of his!

"Don't pity me!" said she. "But you are a dear, good papa always." There was something in this of her old tone of contrasting her experience with his simplicity. This belief in his pastoral character was a tradition in the family.

Perhaps it was a part of this character that made him feel that a blank was being left in their conversation at least called for a passing word to fill it in. "The poor fellow's death..." he began, taking for granted that Jim Coupland's share in the tragedy would be prominent in his daughter's mind as his own. But she stopped him with an exclamation of alarm as he hesitated.

"Why should he die?" she cried. "There is no chance of his death. See what the doctors said—both of them..."

He interrupted her. "I was not speaking of Sir Alfred. I was speaking of Jim Coupland—the blind man, who was killed—is it possible you do not know that he died?" For, to hear her speak, no one could have dreamed she knew of that sombre background to a sad day's work, the man lying dead near at hand.

"Jim Coupland!" she repeated; and the tone of her reply grated on her father, to whom the thought of Jim's death was an ever-present burden. Again she repeated, "Jim Coupland!" with a fuller stress on each syllable that all but seemed contempt. "Yes—but what is Jim Coupland... compared to...?" Then she qualified her words: "Oh, well, of course, one feels all that I suppose one ought to feel, but..."

"But what?"

"But it's no use pretending..."

"My dear Judith, I *don't* understand."

"My dear papa, do you mean to say that if you were in my place... However, it really is no use talking about it." Her manner was excited and resentful, till she suppressed it with an effort, and calmed down to say: "Suppose we *don't* talk about it!"

There was a symptom of indignation in her father's

tone as he replied: "We shall gain nothing by talking at all, Judith, if I am right about your meaning. I may be wrong, my dear"—he softened rather—"but what you *seem* to me to mean, by the way you speak about this poor fellow's shocking death, is . . . well!—in short, is, that you are indifferent to it."

"Is it so very surprising? Would you not think me a hypocrite if I were to profess to be heart-broken about this—this wretched blind cripple, who was the cause of it all?"

This took place in the garden, where the father and daughter had walked apart, to be alone, away from the house. Judith had really been as anxious to speak with him as he with her. But she was not in love with this turn in the conversation. As she stood with bitten lip and flashing eye in front of the wires of a cage containing a sulphur-crested cockatoo—for they were close to the aviary where she and Challis had talked about the parquets—a hideous shriek from the bird caught her last words, and almost seemed a vindictive endorsement of their spirit.

Her father, to whom the death of the innocent man was a thing that threw all other disquiets into the shade, suppressed whatever he felt of resentment or disgust, and showed only wonderment. "My dear child," said he, "you are not yourself. If you were, you *could* not say such things. I can hardly believe that you realise that the man is *dead* when you speak so." He stopped a moment, puzzled. "I suppose, though, he must have been still alive when you last saw him?"

"Oh yes, he was shouting. But I knew he went under the wheel. I *felt* him." Her father shuddered, but she seemed calm.

"Did you not see him again?"

"No—that was the last I saw of him. I never looked for him. . . . Well!—I thought Sir Alfred Challis was killed."

The Baronet felt apologetic. "I see, my dear, of course! Yes—yes—that would be so. I suppose the poor fellow must have had life enough in him to get off the road . . . only . . . well!—I don't understand . . ."

"What doesn't my papa understand?" There is again the shade of the old family tradition of patronage in her voice. Disinclination to accept it in this case may have roughened her father's reply a little:

"I don't understand what Taylor said. I'm sure—yes, I'm sure!—he said he found him *lying in the road*. You must have passed him as you returned?"

"Very likely."

"Judith!" This was sudden remonstrance, almost anger. But it softened as it had done before. "Well—well—perhaps it was only natural... of course, I am forgetting..."

"Perhaps what was only natural?... Oh dear!—well, of course I know what you mean—my not being able to go into hysterics over this man's death. The circumstances are what I believe are called touching, no doubt, but..."

The Baronet was flushed, and quite angry at this. "The circumstances are what are rightly called touching," he said. "Poor Jim Coupland was coming out to meet him—so I understood the Rector—in the full expectation that he was bringing that dear little girl of his back to him. And he was only bringing the news of her death... What did you say?...?" For Judith had muttered *sotto voce* that then it didn't matter. But she did not repeat it, saying only, "I said nothing."

Her father did not believe this, and the end of his sentence hung fire, he looking doubtful. So Judith repeated his last words, to start him fresh. "'He was only bringing the news of the little girl's death'... you were saying?...?"

"Yes!—the news of her death. And then this damnable motor-car of yours comes tearing round the corner, with its damned hooting, and he's under the wheels in a moment! I shall tell Frank I won't have the thing in the house again, once he's taken it away. It's simply a horror and an abomination..." And so on. He was in want of a safety-valve, and here it was. The fact was that Judith's apathy about poor Jim had made him feel thoroughly uncomfortable; it was so unlike his measure and conception of what his family ought to be.

As for Judith, she may have felt that sort of alarm at

this impetuous utterance that a child will remain susceptible of in later years, who would laugh at any like explosion of a non-parent. It is an inheritance from the nursery. Impressed by her father's denunciation of the motor-car, or possibly thinking to herself, "No more scenes, for Heaven's sake!" she relaxed so far as to say, formally, "I'm sorry for the little girl." But she spoiled whatever there was of graceful in a grudging concession by adding, "Perhaps that will satisfy you?"

The old gentleman said nothing, but looked at her, puzzled and hurt at what he shrank from thinking her heartlessness; trying to concoct excuses for it that would make her seem less ungracious. For he loved this daughter of his, so much so that even now he felt proud of her rich beauty, none the worse for all her stress and trouble. Indeed, as she stood there caressing the great white bird that had shrieked—she had taken it as she spoke from its cage, and was kissing its terrifying beak with tenderness—her black mass of hair against its yellow crest; her ivory-white skin against the driven snow of its feathers, each made whiter in its own way by yet another white, the soft folds of a creamy summer dress most late Augusts would have condemned; her beautiful hand in the sun, with the bird's black claw upon its jewels—all these might have said a word in arrest of judgment to a parent readier to disbelieve in his daughter than Sir Murgatroyd. No doubt they influenced him to think that he had succeeded in glossing over what he would have condemned as callousness in one further away from him. But she—as other father's daughters are—was his little girl of twenty years ago grown up. She did not really mean this heartlessness, thought he; it was a sort of *parti pris*—a parade, an affectation!

Was he right, after all? Is the story wrong in its estimate of her? Has it laid too much stress on the hard side of this girl's character—its vanity and love of power? Some moralist has said that no mortal should be called heartless as long as he or she can fall in love. Judith Arkroyd *must* have been in love with Alfred Challis; for see what risks she was running to secure him! Why—yes!—to secure him; that was just it. She *wanted* him, and took the only road to possession that seemed open to

her. Now if, when he lay insensible, that time when there was none to see, she had only stooped to kiss the inanimate hand, had even held it till the nurse returned ! Should we not have felt more sorrow for her after that, when his returning speech showed how completely she had, for the moment, passed from his mind ? No doubt she was in love with him, in one manner of loving. But there are so many !

This story is not going to break its heart about her—to chant dirges over the grave of her share of this *grande passion*. And its commiseration for her grows no mellow from dwelling on the fact it has to record : that exasperation against poor Jim Coupland, to whom she thought proper to ascribe the whole miscarriage of the scheme, was really a source of relief to her—a sort of counter-irritant. To her father, Jim's death and his child's filled the whole horizon—a black cloud. Challis's mishap he did not distress himself about ; he would be all right presently—had he not spoken ? As for his loss of memory, *that* meant nothing. Did he not himself, when he came round after his mishap, ask whether “the trout” had been taken, meaning the fox ? Loss of memory was the rule, not the exception, in such cases. And as for the future of Challis and Judith, that was a difficulty there must be some legal way out of. It was incredible that Challis's wife should go on holding him at arm's length, and yet bar his union with another woman. Some solution of that problem could be found, Bill or no Bill ! As for opposing his daughter's wishes, if they were really deep-rooted, that he would not do. All his opposition to Challis hitherto had been to him as Marianne's husband. If their marriage could be legally annulled or dissolved, he was not going to stand in the way of his daughter's happiness.

But this anger of hers against Jim showed her as a new Judith, whom he had never suspected the existence of. In her childhood she had been proud and domineering with her brothers and sisters—two elder brothers had died in the army, and a sister was married in India ; none of them have crossed this story—but not, so far as her father knew, malignant or revengeful. It gave him a great discomfort at heart ; set him wondering which of her ancestors on either side she had harked back to. Was it

Josceline de Varennes, who, in one of those spirited middle ages, hid a knife under her bridal pillow and gave her first husband a warm reception to his couch, in order that she should marry Hugh Arkroyd ! There was the knife, to prove it, in the glass cabinet with the green-dragon china service. But—as long ago as King Stephen ! Oh no !—it was that old fiend of a great-grandmother of Therèse's. Every old family has an ancestral scapegoat, and a certain "Lady Sarah," of the days of the second George, was very popular in this one.

But Sir Murgatroyd scarcely did more than seek for the scapegoat, in case he should be forced to condemn this member of the congregation. He did not pass sentence. He only said gently, "You will feel differently, Judith dear, when you are yourself again. All this has upset you." In reply to which the young lady said wearily, "We shall see, I suppose, presently. I can't be very demonstrative about either now, though of course it's very sad, and so on, about the little girl." And then she talked to the parrot, kissing him and calling him her darling, and saying now he must go back in his wicked cruel cage. All which her father set down to mere bravado, and thought it best to say no more to her in her present mood. But he had a very serious look on his face as they walked towards the house together.

It was a relief to him to hear the robust musical voice of the Rector in the large drawing-room that opened on the lawn, which was their most natural way back into the house. But Judith paused on the terrace. "Oh dear !" said she. "There's our Father Confessor ! I can't stand sympathy, and I don't want to be catechized, thank you ! Be a dear good papa, and say pretty things for me !" And then, in spite of an attempt at remonstrance by her father, slipped away ; going round by a side-terrace that, ending at the house-corner in a vague architectural effort three centuries old—a Nereid and a Triton and a sink, with an Ionic canopy over all to keep the rain off—allowed of an approach to the main *façade* of the house, and the carriage-drive through the beech avenue in the Park.

Bue she did not at once carry out her scheme of escape. The shadow of the Ionic canopy was sweet on the base of

the sink, and the seat it made was tempting, and the cleanness of its moss and lichens acceptable even to a skirt of *crêpe-de-Chine*. It was only an old dress, too, according to Judith's ideas, so she spent a little time with the Triton and the Nereid before going on into the house. She felt stunned and bewildered, for all she had shown so bold a front, and was glad of rest.

Presently her desire to know that Challis was progressing got the better of a terror that was on her that his oblivion might be lasting. She could hear the voices of the party in the drawing-room still in conversation, the Rector's very distinctly; so she decided that she could slip indoors with safety, and rose to go.

A little diffident gate, that had shrunk away into the heart of a yew hedge, led out to the drive and entrance to the house; and one could see and not be seen there, even by visitors who had been over the ground before. Judith stopped at this gate, not to be caught by an early sample, unexplained. It was not yet twelve o'clock, and there at the door was a vehicle with one horse, steaming. And a lady in black was descending from it, and Samuel evidently meant to let her in. Judith waited for her to vanish; gave her ample time, more than enough, to be shown into the drawing-room, and then went straight on to the house.

The vehicle was a hired fly from Furnival, whose driver Judith at once recognised as an *habitué* of the railway-station. He was mopping his brow with his handkerchief, for the morning had become very hot; but he put his hat on to touch it to Miss Arkroyd, who of course was very familiar to him. Having done this, he took it off again, and went on mopping. He referred to the dryness of this sort of day pointedly; but Judith missed his sub-intent, and conceived that the position was covered by the approach of Bullett the groom, with a pail of water for the horse. The lady must have come straight from the train.

Judith looked through the glass door—as she thought, carefully—to make sure the great hall at the foot of the stairs was empty. She was quite without conjecture or suspicion as to who the visitor was, or she might not have contented herself so easily that the coast was clear. Any-

how, there was no one visible from where she stood and looked through. So she passed in and walked straight across to the stairs, and so up to the first landing. As she turned the angle, she saw a lady in black, whom she did not recognise, seated in the recess on the left, who rose when their eyes met. Not a bad-looking woman, of a sort, but not self-explanatory.

Count over the times Judith had met Marianne. They do not amount to much—at least, until that evening at the theatre. Two dinners and a visit in London a couple of years ago—consider how little that means to a young lady who may be under an equal social obligation to remember half-a-dozen new faces every day! Consider, too, that in this early time Mr. Challis was in the eyes of this young lady nothing beyond a popular author whose works she hadn't read; and as for his wife, why should she notice her at all? "Which was she, Sib?" we can fancy her asking. Was she, for instance, the underdressed one with the mole, or the rawboned giggler? Then, as to that visit to the play a few months later, think of the exciting pre-occupations! Is it certain that Miss Arkroyd paid as much attention to her hostess as you and I might have thought the circumstances demanded? Anyhow, there had been nothing to fix Marianne in Judith's memory to such an extent that she should recall at once the travel-worn—and trouble-worn—face she hardly glanced at, and would have left without a second look had its owner not risen, as though to speak. She might have done so, nevertheless, if it had not been for something in the visitor's action which suggested a lady kept outside the drawing-room rather than a person allowed inside the house. You know the sort of difference—the difference between subservient conciliation and conciliatory self-assertion.

What caught and retained Judith's second look was that this person answered to neither description. Her manner was *sui generis*, and the *genus* had in it a touch of something odd that wasn't insanity. Was it desperation? It was creditable to Judith's penetration that she at once dismissed the only idea that suggested itself. An image shot into her mind of Jim Coupland's sister, employed as cook by Challis, humorously described by



him more than once. Stuff and nonsense!—out of the question!

"Are you . . . being attended to?" She threw a slight smile of protest into the question, to guard against the possibility of wrong form. If she had mistaken the facts, her hearer would understand the implication of courtesy—no fear of misunderstanding between us!

"The young man went in. I can wait." The speaker looked away from Miss Arkroyd. Her manner was not conciliatory. But even then no idea crossed Judith's mind of who she actually was. In fact, prohibitives were at every point of the compass. How could the news have reached Marianne? How could she have come so quick to Royd?

"Is it anything I can do?" This was bald civility, on the face of it; almost stipulated that it should be refused. The speaker's arrested foot on the next stair waited to go up when the refusal should warrant it. But it had to wait, long enough to make its owner wonder what was coming.

"Yes!—you can, Miss Arkroyd." Judith's good-breeding concealed her surprise. She stood committed, and awaited the instruction. Was this tiresome person going to give it, or be choked by it? It came at last. "You can tell me whether my husband is dying or not."

And then Judith knew that she was face to face with Marianne Challis, the woman she had injured.

Sir Murgatroyd found his wife talking with Athelstan Taylor, of course about the current events. "This is good news about Challis," said the Rector. "Lady Arkroyd tells me he has recovered consciousness."

The Baronet demurred slightly. "Ye-es. At least, he has spoken."

"And not incoherently?"

"N-no. Oh no—not *incoherently*." But the stress on this word had reservation in it, and her ladyship exclaimed impatiently, "Oh, my dear, you always make the worst of everything!" A pitying smile, aside to the Rector, was quite a little essay on the unreasonableness of husbands—that intractable class. Mr. Taylor looked from one to the other. It would be early to take sides,<sup>3</sup> but of course the

prescribed form in such a case is to help the wife to commiserate her mate's shortcomings. It was safest to endorse the lady's view, provisionally.

"We mustn't expect too much at first," said he, deprecating the crude judgment of inexperience, a quality common to all our family except ourselves. "The author won't be in trim for dictating copy for some days to come, I'm afraid." He hesitated a moment, before adding, "You have kept it from him, I suppose, for the present?"

"Mr. Taylor is referring to poor Coupland's death, my dear," said the Baroness. "Which his wife resented slightly, as suggesting that her sympathies needed a stimulus. 'Do you suppose I don't understand that, my dear?'" said she *sotto voce*; a reply apart. But she might just as well have left the matter to stand there, and not let herself be betrayed into a candid admission that, in view of the sad end of poor little Lizarann, her father's death almost assumed the form of a Merciful Dispensation. We should be thankful, at least, that he had been spared the hearing of it.

"The whole thing has been terribly sad," said Athelstan Taylor. Indeed, he seemed as if he could hardly bear to speak of it. He turned from the subject abruptly. When could he look forward to seeing Challis without danger of his hurting himself by talking?

Sir Murgatroyd looked enquiry at his wife, and she at him. Then he took the reply on himself, as she seemed very doubtful. "The fact is, Rector," said he, "it isn't by any means certain that he would know you. He can hardly be said to have come to himself yet. What he said to..."

"What he said to the nurse was hardly sense," Lady Arkroyd struck in abruptly. No doubt she wanted to keep Judith out of it. But Sir Murgatroyd held to his purpose—would have no evasion or prevarication.

"I was not referring to what he said to the nurse, my dear Therèse. I was going on to speak of what he said to Judith. What *did* he say to the nurse?"

"Oh, I don't know! Tell it your own way." Lady Arkroyd abdicates.

Her husband did not notice her impatience, but con-

tinued: "It happened that my daughter was present when he showed consciousness, and he did not recognise her, and asked for his wife. It was a very singular thing, too, that when Judith told him we did not know where to write to her, he gave the address he lived at several years ago. But I cannot say that seems to me so strange as his non-recognition of Judith, considering..."

"My dear!" from the lady, remonstratively.

But the Baronet sticks to his colours, though he speaks temperately. "My dear Therèse, Mr. Taylor is so old a friend that I really do think it would be absurd to make any secrets. After all, what does the whole thing amount to?...?" Here the Rector interrupted him.

"I think it's only fair of me, Lady Arkroyd, to say that I know all about it already. This poor chap—I'm not going to say a word in defence of him—took me into his confidence some weeks ago. That is to say, he sketched as possible the scheme which I now see he and Judith must have attempted to carry out. I tried to dissuade him from it, and, indeed, fancied he had given it up.... No; I thought it best to hold my tongue about it, in order to retain my influence with him. He had been speaking freely to me, assuming that what he said would go no farther, and I should only have lost my hold over him by talking to you of it, without any corresponding gain." This was in answer to what was evidently the beginning of a question: "Why was the knowledge of this plan to be kept from us?"

However, the Baronet was ready with ungrudging admission that the Rector had acted for the best; his wife with a rather more stinted allowance of assent. Of course, Judith would have gone her own way in any case... but still!... "Are we not her parents? Should we not have been told on principle?" seemed to be an implication lurking behind lips that had shut it in, and leaking out through a stirring of the eyebrows. Her husband, averse to reserves, and noting this one, said, "What were you going to say, Therèse?"

But Therèse said, "Do wait, my dear!" to him, and to the Rector, "Would you excuse me one moment?... What is it, Samuel?" The last was because Samuel was

in the room with a card on a hand-tray, to be dealt with furtively, if possible, its bearer's mission in life being self-subordination. Being called on to state what it was, he said it was a lady, and might she speak to her ladyship for a moment. This was a metaphrasis, because it was palpably a card, on which her ladyship read to herself the name "Mrs. M. Craik," and seemed none the wiser. Then she handed it to Sir Murgatroyd, who took his glasses to the reading of it, and said, "No, I don't know the name." Whereupon her ladyship said, "I suppose I must see her. You'll excuse me, Mr. Taylor?" and departed, after instructions to Samuel about the room the lady was to be shown into.

Now, if she had read the name aloud, the chances are that Athelstan Taylor, who had a lively enough recollection of his visit of intercession to Marianne's mother a year ago, would have remembered it. And then Lady Arkroyd would have known beforehand who it was she was on her way to interview.

As it was, she continued quite in the dark about the identity of "Mrs. M. Craik," until, following Samuel at what she thought a sufficient interval to allow of his disposing of the stranger as arranged, she came out upon a scene at the stairfoot in the entrance-hall that taxed her presence of mind; with a result that was not an uncommon one with her, that she could see no way of meeting the demand upon it, except by an appeal to her husband to rescue her. For, ready as she always was to set his judgment aside when doing so involved her in no difficulty, she always looked to him to extricate her when she found herself in a bad one.

"Oh, thank God if he is living . . . if he is only living to speak to me once . . . just once! Oh, do say again that he is not dead. I will never think ill of you again. Oh, do let me go to him where he is now. . . ." Thus far the poor soul had spoken through a deluge of tears, when Lady Arkroyd came out from a side-door, and her mind said to her that if it was to be hysterics, she did wish Sir Murgatroyd would come. But as to exactly who this was, this female in black who was making a scene gratuitously, the thing of all others her ladyship hated, she was for the

moment quite at a loss to guess. Of course, a moment's reflection would have made it clear, but, you see, she was so totally unprepared. Her first information as to whom she was speaking with—seeing that she was as much at sea about Marianne's personal identity as Judith had been at first—came from her daughter, standing handsome and impassive on the stairs, above this excited woman; making her seem a suppliant by her own unmoved placidity, and herself almost cruel by the severity of the contrast.

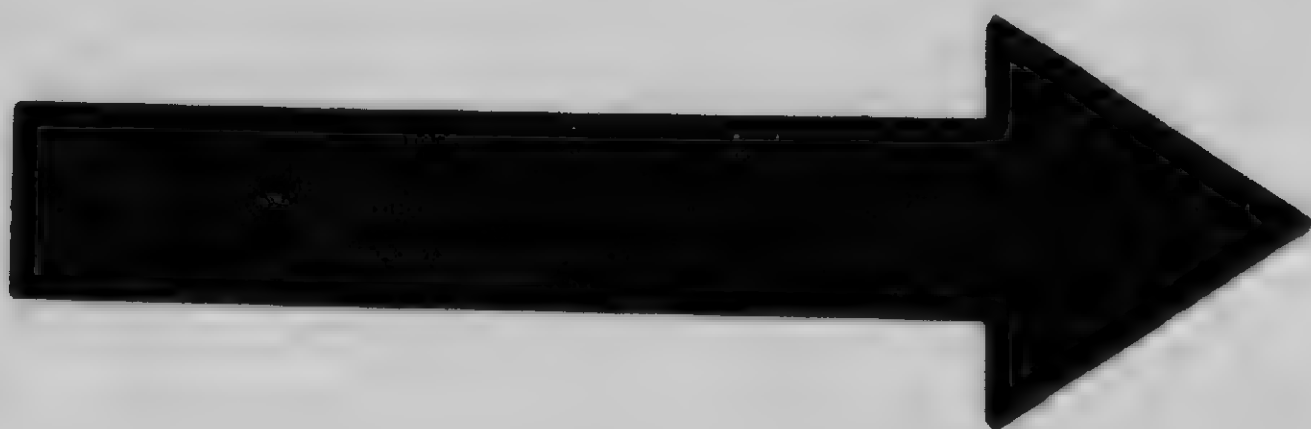
"This is Lady Challis, mamma." Judith's speech quite ignores the tension of the situation—passes it by. "She wishes to go to Sir Alfred. Is there any objection?" What can it matter to the speaker?—is the implication. Let her go to Sir Alfred, by all means!

Her mother's breath is fairly taken away. "Lady Challis!" she repeats. And then, as silence seems to wait for something else, the blankest interjection: "Oh-h-h!" with the minimum of meaning sound can convey.

Then poor Marianne, with no Charlotte at hand to suggest possible ugly interpretations, bursts out, "I am *not* Lady Challis. I am nothing of the sort. Dear Lady Arkroyd—you must remember me?—you came to see me at home. Do let me go—let me go to my husband!"

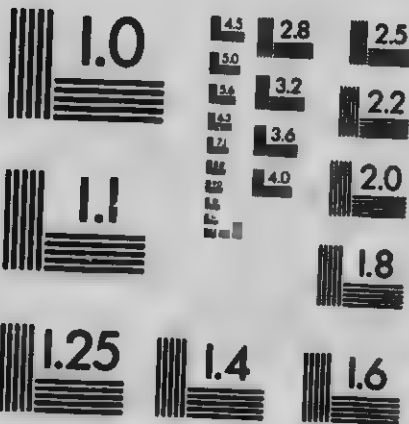
Lady Arkroyd was puzzled. Perhaps, after all, there had been a mistake at the outset, and there *had* been all along "something against" this impossible wife. Nothing suggested itself to her as a practicable course. This lady had turned to her with a beseeching face, for which she had "Why, of course!" ready in her heart, being quite a good-natured woman, but there were such odd complications afoot she could not utter it. Judith, from her security behind Marianne, was endeavouring to telegraph without audible speech the words "Deceased Wife's Sister"; and, indeed, after two or three repetitions, her mother caught the clue. But she was little, if any, the wiser; and it was then the prompting came to rush for succour to her husband, still talking to the Rector in the drawing-room.

"Do you mind my speaking to my husband for a moment first?" Marianne minds nothing, so long as it is on a road that leads to her object, and her ladyship goes quickly away.



# MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

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"May I leave you alone for a few moments, Lady Challis?" says Judith, going. "Please step in here till my mother returns, and sit down." That is, into the little room off the landing. Judith goes upstairs quickly; and Samuel, always on the watch, officiates as pilot.

Lady Arkroyd walked back into the drawing-room. She looked despair before trusting herself to speech, and the action of her hands laid an imaginary case for despair before the two gentlemen, who stopped talking to hear its spoken particulars. Her husband encouraged revelation by saying "Well?" interrogatively.

"Oh, my dear, what is to be done? It's the Deceased Wife's Sister! I wish you would come."

The Baronet gives the slightest of whistles. "Where have you got her?" he asks.

"My dear, she's in hysterics!"

"Yes—but *where*?"

"In the front hall. And Judith is there *with* her!"

"I say, we'd better go." Thus the Baronet to the Rector, who assents without reserve. Observe that this colloquy has gone on in undertones. Not that anyone could hear—they might have shouted, for that matter—but to endorse the tension of the situation.

Arriving in the hall, and seeing first the place where Judith had been standing, her mother felt a sense of relief. Her absence made the position easier to deal with. But—where was the Deceased Wife's Sister? Samuel explained. He had shown the lady into the *mezzanina* room, as directed. Samuel felt proud of his Italian, over this.

Marianne had not been sorry to be alone again for a moment, after her first effort of self-announcement. She looked out through the window over the rounded slopes, thickly wooded enough to seem a stretch of forest; with the little groups of roe-deer in the glades the beech-woods grudged them, in their ambition to cover the whole land. She saw the wide level lawns, clothed with the grass of centuries, dreaming of the music of bygone scythes, before the days of mowing-machines and their economies of power no man stinted then; the peacocks walking with precision, and satisfied that they were appreciated; the beds ablaze with asters and marigolds and dahlias, and standard roses



still blooming, and proud of their little tickets that told what variety they were. She saw all these, and out beyond them the smoke-cloud of the great manufacturing centre, with its confidence of one day gobbling up the park and its wood and warren, vert and venison, and getting at its coal, and using it up to make steel armour-plates, that shall send other armour-plates to the bottom of the sea. Unless, indeed, civilisation collapses; whereof it is not proper form to say—the sooner the better!

All this has nothing to do with Marianne, except, perhaps, as showing what a many things did not cross her mind that might have done so. The whole thing was dim to her, and swam about. Now that the excitement was less, she began to be afraid she might make a fool of herself and faint off, as she did that time with Charlotte Eldridge. She was sorry now that after travelling so far on a very poor breakfast in London, she had not had the sense to get a biscuit or a sandwich at Farnival. When Sir Murgatroyd and her ladyship came into the *mezzanina* room, they found her seated with closed eyes, and alarmingly white. But she rallied at the sound of their voices. Oh no!—she was all right. Now all she wanted was to know about her husband. Was he in danger? Had he been in danger?

The Baronet, in a voice good to banish hysteria in any form, justifiable or otherwise, rather outwent the truth in his testimony. Sir Alfred had never been in any danger at all! Who had told Lady Challis that story? The old gentleman's pooh-poohing laugh was pleasant to Marianne's ears. Only she didn't feel quite sure she wasn't an impostor. She had come on the distinct understanding—with whom, hard to specify—that Titus was dying. Had she been imposed upon?

"It was in the Sunday paper yesterday," she said. "And I saw it on all the posters at the stations, coming by rail."

"Those damnable newspapers—you'll excuse me, Lady Challis—I should have all the editors hanged if I had my way. Yes, I would indeed! Why, there never *was* any danger! These things happen every day." He went on to narrate how, when his mare Eurydice threw him at Stamford's Croft, he had been carried home unconscious,

and remained so over two days. "But your mare had to be shot, my dear," said his wife, vaguely.

When Athelstan Taylor, who had hung back a moment to exchange a few words with the nurse, whom he had met on the stairs coming from Challis's bedsi followed his companions into the *mezzanina* room, he was surprised and pleased to find the Baronet apparently on the most comfortable and communicative terms with the embarrassing lady-visitor. It was all just as if none of the events that made the visit embarrassing had ever happened. Marianne might have been the wife of any neighbour, the victim of a bad accident; who had come at a summons to learn the worst, and was being assured that no bones were badly broken, and the patient in perfect trim for inspection, without a shock to the feelings of the most sensitive. The escapade of Challis and Judith might have been a dream, and the terms he had been on with Marianne those of Philemon and Baucis. Ignoring was evidently the order of the day, and the Rector made up his mind to comply with it.

"This is our Rector, Lady Challis," said the old gentleman, introducing him. "The Rev. Athelstan Taylor. I think he will tell you he is just as confident as I am that Sir Alfred will be himself again in the course of a day or two—perhaps in a few hours. Eh, Rector?"

The voice of the big man with the fresh face, sun-tanned with a pedestrian summer, was a new reassurance to the frightened, worn-out woman. It said, filling the little room musically, "Every reason to suppose it, at any rate! I hope we shall all be as lucky if we are ever in as bad an accident, which Heaven forbid!" But an inflexion of his tone contained reference to other injury done in this accident, and made Marianne remember the details in the newspaper. "Was there not a man killed?" she asked.

All looked very sad. "Yes, unhappily," was the joint reply. The Rector began giving some particulars of Jim's death, but stopped. "You were just going up to Sir Alfred," he said. For the general bias of the party in the room, as he entered it, had seemed to be towards migration. The visitor had half-risen from a sofa, but had fallen back as the conversation showed signs of continuing.

Lady Arkroyd and her husband exchanged looks, and appeared to assent to the move. Marianne began to rise again, but with such visible sign of fatigued effort that the other three signalled to one another, so to speak, that this would never do! Lady Arkroyd spoke, preferring to indicate that her husband, with man's proverbial want of tact, was inconsiderately overlooking a guest's comfort. "My dear, I'm sure Lady Challis has had nothing to eat since she left London, and she was travelling all night. She's completely worn out." She added a corollary. "Men forget these things."

The Rev. Athelstan had a suggestion to make: "One minute," said he. "Just let me say... I spoke to the nurse just now. She said Sir Alfred had not talked again, but had shown he wanted to get rid of the bandage on his head. She was going to take it off, as she says it isn't the least wanted. Lady Challis would just have time to get a little refreshed while she does it. And then Sir Alfred will be looking quite like himself. You know, there was no visible injury ever, except that scratch on the forehead—just a bit of plaister!"

And thus it came about that Marianne Challis was taking a cup of black coffee and a biscuit, but nothing else, thank you, in the house she had refused to follow her husband to over a year ago, at the very moment that his second return of consciousness prompted him to ask again for Polly Anne.

Judith, barely pausing to see that Marianne was "shown in" to the side-room—because it is not enough to know which door; you have to be properly shown in by a servant—had gone quickly to the patient's room, meeting the nurse by the way. She stopped her.

"Is Sir Alfred Challis conscious?"

"I think a little more so. He hasn't spoken, but he evidently wants that bandage off his head. I thought it might be better to mention it before taking it off. Not that I'm really afraid of the responsibility. Only it's as well to be on the safe side. Is Lady Arkroyd downstairs?"

"I think she's just coming up. Sir Alfred's wife is here."

"Oh, indeed. I hope she won't upset him. I shall find

Lady Arkroyd downstairs. . . . Oh, by-the-bye, Miss Arkroyd, what did your mother say was the name of the big parson—Reverend what ?”

“Reverend Athelstan Taylor.”

“I thought so.” And the nurse, a well-defined and explicit person, went downstairs as Judith passed on along the lobby.

The figure on the bed was moving slightly as she entered the room, feeling how venturesome her conduct was ; and was evidently fidgeting, as the nurse had said, about the bandage. She went up and stood beside him, hiding a kind of desperation under an immovable exterior. Should she speak to him by name ? If so, by what name ? As his memory was playing such tricks, might not his present style and title be strange to him ? Besides, she had never called him “Sir Alfred.” And if she called him “Scroop,” as she had done almost throughout, and *still* he did not recognise her, how then ? But surely he was speaking again !

“You’re very good—but what am I being kept here for ? I say !—I hope Polly Anne’s all right. . . .”

“Please don’t pull at that bandage ; it shall be taken off as soon as the nurse comes back. Why shouldn’t ‘Polly Anne’ be all right ?” She couldn’t help the inverted commas.

“Because she hasn’t come. Did you send to the address I gave ?”

Judith replied stonily, “Your wife is here. She will come directly. . . . Listen ! Do you not know me ?” For she knew how short their time must be ; how brief and abrupt the farewell that had to be packed into it, whatever form it might take. She did not certainly know whether she hoped he would say “Yes.”

He kept her waiting, to turn his eyes full on her and consider the point. “N-n-n-no !” said he, prolonging the first letter. “I don’t *think* I do.” His civil manner was heart-rending to the woman beside him. Recollect that only three days before, though they would not have become *de facto* man and wife, their compact of marriage would have been irrevocable ! He kept his eyes still on her with a puzzled look, adding immediately after, “Could you not tell me of something to remind me ?”

What to remind him of, and avoid all claim of tender memory for the past, in view of the fact that he might disallow that past altogether!—that was Judith's difficulty. She must keep to suggestions prosaic and bald—just the colourless events of daily life. She tried to speak with absolute calm indifference, tempered by good-will.

"Is it possible you do not remember this room—the room the German Baroness saw the ghost in?" She made a not too successful attempt at a laugh over this. "Why!—you slept here before!"

"Where is 'here'?"

"My father's house, Royd Hall. I am Judith Arkroyd."

Challis's voice and manner were like his old self again as he answered, "I do feel so out of it!" and laughed a sort of apology. "I'm horribly ashamed. I shall have to ask Polly Anne to jog my memory. Is she coming?"

"Oh yes—she's coming." Judith had hard work to refrain from breaking out "Have you forgotten Trout Bend and the convict's bridge; the little Tophet garden and the letter, and all my shawl in a blaze? Have you no memory of the play you wrote for me to play in; of your fatuous declaration of a passion a man of your sobriety should have been ashamed of; above all of our meeting of two days since, our reckless race along the sunlit road, and its tragic ending?" But she knew all this, that her tongue was itching to remind him of, was good for oblivion only; knew it by a thousand tokens, most of all by the revelation chance had given of the background of his mind. Even the knowledge that all fruition of their crazy scheme was perforce at an end was as nothing compared to that. Therefore she felt it safest to say curtly that Marianne was coming, and to add that the nurse would be back in a moment to remove the bandage.

Challis closed his eyes again with a tired sigh. "I can't trust myself to talk," said he. "All sorts of things keep coming into my head, and convincing me I must be out of my senses. But I'm clear about one thing. Some one is being very kind to me. I have a general impression that I don't deserve it, and I want to thank... want to thank..." He seemed to give it up as a bad job, and to relapse into half-stupor.

Judith was fast coming to the conclusion that the sooner she and Chellis saw the last of one another the better for both. But "to part at last without a kiss!" The words of Morris's poem came into her mind. Well—suppose in this case we were to say, "without a handshake"? That would be quite enough. At least, that knight beside the Haystack in the Floods would have known whom the kissed lips belonged to. Challis's disordered head had constituted him a stranger to her. All the same, to have the tale of their love end on a blank and vanish, and none write a word of epilogue—not so much as a bare *finis*!—grated on her sense of the fitness of things. She would just try to print the word herself, without provoking an appendix. If he was insensible again, and did not hear her, what did it matter?

"The nurse will come directly," she repeated. "I have to go now. Good-bye!"

He opened his eyes again, rousing himself. "Oh—good-bye—good-bye!" said he. "I am sorry you have to go." He took her hand, shaking it frankly and warmly. She was afraid the touch of her own hand might bring back the past—the useless past—and almost stinted to return its pressure.

She turned in the doorway, and said, referring to footsteps approaching the room without, "Perhaps you will know this gentleman who is coming now, and he will tell you who I am." A bitterness in her heart made the last words come, and then she said to the nurse and Athelstan Taylor, who was with her, "He's been talking again, quite like himself, only he doesn't know me from Adam. But I fancy he'll soon be all right."

"That's good hearing," said the Rector cheerfully. "You'll find the Duchess downstairs. She's asking for you, to take you to Thanet."

"Oh, is she? I think I shall put my things on at once, and go with her." She went to her room and rang for her maid, whom she sent with a message to the Duchess. She would be ready in five minutes, she said, and meant to stop the night.

When the little handmaiden had finished her ministrations, and her mistress and the Duchess had driven away,

she was found in tears by a fellow-servant, and explained them by saying Miss Judith was angry with her. Because she had never once called her Cintilla, but only Clemency, which was merely her proper name.

"My dear sir," said Challis to the Rector, standing by his bed, "you say, 'Don't I know you?' And you say it so confidently that it convinces me I *ought* to know you. But I can't say I do. Honour bright!"

"Never mind! Don't try to think about it. You'll come to rights presently. Let this good lady get that thing off your head. The best thing you can do is to lie still."

So Challis lay still and listened to the conversation. And this is what he heard:

"I hadn't flattered myself you would remember your humble servant, Mr. Taylor, but I felt pretty sure you wouldn't have forgotten the incident."

"I wasn't likely to do that. Faugh!—I've got the flavour of the place upon me still. That antiseptic sack and rubber gloves!—all the horror of it! But apart from that, the story the creature told was such a queer one."

"Seal of confession, I suppose?"

"Hardly that! But not, perhaps, to be repeated except to serve some special end. I understood he left it to my discretion."

"I had no motive but curiosity. Don't tell me!"

"How came you to remember my name?"

"I didn't. Miss Arkroyd told it me. I remembered your look when I showed you into the ward. But I ought to have remembered your name, because I posted Dr. Crumpton's letter to you..."

"I remember. It was to ask which of his aliases this man had given me. They didn't know what name to bury him under."

"Oh, I remember... Thomas Essendean. No, it wasn't that. That was one they rejected. What was it he told you?"

"Kay Thorne, or perhaps *Key*—Key Thorne... What?" For Challis, by this time bandageless and ready to receive visitors, but evidently glad to keep his head down on the pillow, had uttered an exclamation, without

opening his eyes. "What's 'hullo,' Challis?" said the Rector. For a moment, he felt afraid that the patient's mind was wandering. But only for a moment. For when Challis spoke again, it was quite quietly and collectedly.

"Name of my first wife's first . . . no!—I don't mean that. Name of a friend of mine eight—ten—years ago. Not Kaith; *Keith* Horne. He wasn't a shining light. He came to awful grief in the end. Penal servitude, I believe. . . ."

"You mustn't tire yourself with talking," said the nurse. "We shall have her ladyship up directly. You know she's coming?"

"Oh no!—might my wife come? Her ladyship can come afterwards."

The Rector understood. He glanced at the nurse indicatively. "Mrs. Challis had better come first," he said. Then he said good-bye to Challis, and went his way. In the passage was Lady Arkroyd, followed by Marianne. "You'll find him immensely improved," said he. "I can't say he remembered me, but he will next time."

Then, as he shook hands with the scared and bewildered lady in black, he thought to himself, "Now, what a queer story I could tell you, if I didn't feel that the right course is to keep a lock on my tongue!"

For it had just come home to him that Marianne was *not* Challis's Deceased Wife's Sister at all, because "poor Kate" had never been his Deceased Wife. 'He was the late Mr. Keith Horne's! And as regards the "living in sin business," evidently *she* was the real Simon Pure, and Marianne a mere pretender!



## CHAPTER LIII

"It's a magnificent match, and she'll make a perfect Duchess," said the Reverend Athelstan Taylor a twelve-month later—only six months ago at this present time of writing "And Thyringia will make a perfect dowager. But the old Duke may live to see a grandchild or two. Doesn't do to count one's coronets before they're hatched—eh, Addie?"

"I do wish, Yorick dearest, you would be a little less secretive, and tell me what she really said that time."

"I have told you, sweetheart, all there was to tell. I haven't been keeping anything back."

"Never mind! Tell it again."

"Well—it was just like this." He dropped his voice to sadness, as in deference to something sad outside the matter of his speech. "I had just come from reading the service over poor Jim and..."

"Darling little Lizarann! Oh, Yorick, I don't believe I shall ever love my own child as..." The speaker could not utter another word; and, indeed, her tears were not the only ones that had to be got clear of before the Rector could proceed. In time he got on with his twice-told tale; but their subjugation overlapped his words that followed:

"Well—it was *then*! I dare say the young woman didn't mean to be supercilious and provoking, but she *was*. Why couldn't she leave the funeral alone? She hadn't come to it, and no one had asked her to do so..."

"I don't believe there were half-a-dozen people in the village that didn't."

"Very likely not. But I wasn't going to take her to task for it. *She* began. Talked of it as if it had been a public meeting! Had heard there was quite a large gathering at Blind Jim's funeral. 'You were not there,'

said I, simply as a matter of fact. But I suppose she felt there was a cap that fitted, for she said: 'I thought you would think the family quite sufficiently represented by my father and mother.' I answered—and I dare say my manner was rather irritable—'I wasn't counting heads, Judith.' She said, with a disagreeable shrewdness: 'But you noticed my absence?' 'If you ask me,' said I, 'I did notice it; and of all your family, I think, under the circumstances, your presence was the one most called for.' She replied, with that exasperating placidity she is such a mistress of: 'Possibly some persons acquainted with the whole story might have thought a parade of emotion uncalled for on my part.' I said, rather angrily: 'No one expects a parade of emotion from you, but only the common debt all are ready to pay to the memory of a fellow-creature tragically killed—especially those who have had any share, however indirect, in his death!' She replied: 'I don't think we need make any pretences. You know as well as I do what share this man had in frustrating an object I had at heart; and at least you cannot expect me to be grateful to him!'

"You were alone, then?"

"Yes—her mother had gone on in front. My answer to her was substantially that, if she knew what I knew, she would think poor Jim a benefactor, instead of bearing a grudge against him. 'What do you mean?' said she. 'Please don't be enigmatical.' I then told her bluntly what her position would have been had her proposed marriage with Challis been put into practice—been acted on. I told her of the legalism under which the validity of Challis's marriage with Marianne would stand or fall, according as his previous marriage was void or otherwise; and that it *was* void, as his first wife's husband was living when he married her. I must say I admired her self-possession when she heard what a precipice she had been on the edge of. . . ."

"What did she say?"

"She paused in her walk with a sort of 'what-next-I-wonder?' look on her face, and a slight 'oh—really!' movement of the head. Then she walked on again, as before; merely saying, as coolly as if she were talking of

a new dress—more coolly—'The marriage laws are too funny for words.' "

"What did you say?"

"I said they were; feeling free to do so with dear Gus at Tunis. But I saw that she was perfectly well aware what a narrow escape she had had. However, she'll forget all about it when she's a Duchess. It's a pity he's so much younger than she is."

"Will the Challises ever know Marianne was his wife all along?"

"I hope not. It would break Marianne's heart. Her belief in her sister would be shaken. Now they're so happy together again it would be a grievous pity she should know anything about it. She's quite content with the retrospective working of the new Statute. Enough is as good as a feast. . . ."

This was not the end of the conversation. But the story sees that it was to blame for not telling some more of the antecedent circumstances that had made it possible, and now hastens to make good the deficit. The Rector can wait.

Bishop Barham had been as good as his word. He allowed a reasonable time to elapse for the passing of the Act legalising marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister, and then towards Christmas addressed a letter of paternal remonstrance to the Rector of Royd, "pointing out" some contingent effects of the Act which it was his duty, as that reverend gentleman's Diocesan, to lay stress upon in the interests of public decorum, as the slightest laxity in such a matter might have an injurious influence on the morality of clergy and laity alike. He was not suggesting for one moment that any infraction of moral law whatever was contemplated, or was even conceivable, in the present case. But a well-defined rule of life had to be observed by persons on whose part the slightest deviation from the strict observance of an enjoined conformity might act injuriously on the community. Here the prelude ended, and the Bishop came to the scratch. He could not shut his eyes to the fact that the Rev. Athelstan's household consisted only—children apart—of himself and a lady, the sister of his deceased wife. Since the recent

lamentable decision of the Legislature to remove all legal restriction on marriages of persons so related, thus placing the Canon Law of the Church at variance with the Law of the Land, there could be no doubt that Mr. Taylor's domestic arrangements laid him open to censure, and might easily give rise to a serious public scandal. There was no doubt they transgressed the general rule which decides that persons marriageable but not married shall not be domiciled alone together, however circumspect their conduct may be. The Bishop contrived to hint that it was impossible to say where youth and susceptibility ended, and a grouty and untempting elderliness began, and that on this account especially his remarks applied in this case. Aunt Bessy was palpably neither Lalage nor Doris, but the principle held good all the same. He therefore, *et cetera*.

The Rev. Athelstan bit his lip and flushed angrily as he read the gratuitous insult to Aunt Bessy, who, although prim and intensely conservative, was not yet thirty-eight—for the two things *are* compatible—and immediately wrote as follows in answer to the Bishop :

"MY LORD,

"I can only interpret your letter as enjoining upon me one of two courses. Either my sister-in-law must reside elsewhere or become my wife. But I understand that the Canon Law of the Church still discountenances marriage with a Deceased Wife's Sister ; and, further, that by a special clause of the recent Act nothing therein relieves a clergyman from any ecclesiastical censure to which he would have been liable previously for contracting such a marriage.

"If your Lordship will guarantee me against ecclesiastical censure for so doing, I will (having first ascertained Miss Caldecott's views on the subject) make arrangements for our marriage at an early date, with a view to removing the scandal you complain of.

"If your Lordship can be prevailed on to officiate at the wedding, I shall regard your doing so as the best security I can have against ecclesiastical censure hereafter."

To which the Bishop's reply was :

"DEAR MR. TAYLOR,

"It is my Episcopal duty to point out to you that such a marriage as you indicate, though legal, would be now, as always, contrary to the Canon Law of the Church, and in my opinion repugnant to every feeling of Christian morality. I refrain from using the adjective I am tempted to apply to it.

"But as I hold it to be consistent with my conscience as a Churchman to defer to public opinion when it coincides with my own, I am inclined to accept as well-grounded the view that households such as your present one may become the subjects of unfavourable comment, as a consequence (although the least pernicious one) of the recent Act of Parliament. I trust I have expressed clearly what I conceive to be your obvious duty alike as a Christian pastor and a member of Society.

"With regard to the concluding paragraph of your letter, I make no reply, except that in my opinion it calls for an apology.

"I am, etc.,

"Faithfully yours,

"IGNATIUS NOX."

The Rev. Athelstan showed both these letters of the Bishop to Adeline Fossett, his adviser in difficulties from boyhood, when that lady came to pay a visit to the Rectory a week before Christmas, when she could not come, because of leaving her mother alone. Families cohere at Christmas, as long as they are plural, and can. The cohesion of a unit is involuntary and continuous.

Now, Miss Fossett's opinions had been much modified when the debate in the Peers enlightened her about the views of the Roman Church, which—she inferred—is quite willing to marry all the sisters of the largest families successively to any *bona fide* widower. Possibly the Sacrament of Marriage might be refused to a man who had murdered his last wife in connection with his suit for her sister's hand. But *Amor omnia vincit*. Could the solemn rite be refused to him if he brought the ring in his pocket to the scaffold, and the Registrar was in attendance?

However, that has nothing to do with Adeline Fossett.

She, to be brief, laughed at the Bishop's letters. The story has told how delighted she would have been to unite in marriage her two friends, whom she had long ago destined for one another, only the well-laid scheme ganged ageo. And here she had the Pope and the Duke of Norfolk to back her, if consanguinity cropped up again! Clearly Yorick's destiny was to marry Aunt Bessy, and be happy. Unless he hated her, of course!

The Rector laughed his big laugh. "Oh no, I don't hate Bess!" said he. "I'm very fond of Bess—I *am*." And then he laughed again, and seemed immensely amused.

"Look here, Yorick! Don't be a goose. She's in the next room. Just you go in and tell her your idea, and see what *she* thinks. Do, dear boy! Only you mustn't be as cold as Charity, you know!"

"All right. I'll do justice to the position."

"You will?—promise!... Very good. Now, Yorick—Yorick—*dear* old Yorick! See what I'll do! I'll give you my blessing and God-speed!" And then she took him by both hands and kissed his face. He would have liked to return the kiss; but, then, you see, it would have impaired the elder-sister tone.

Was Adeline Fossett aware how she had put the last nail in the coffin of that little scheme, when she presumed on their mock-fraternity in that dangerous way? Why—she wasn't even his Deceased Wife's half-Sister, Marianne's relation to Challis!

She sat and listened for what she expected to go on in the next room. But it came not. As she waited there—a fair distance from the door, not to be eavesdropping—she looked more than ever as if she might have married. Her colour went and came as Hope rose and fell; and every little chance that Yorick's voice was going to be less good-humoured and genial, and come from his heart with a proper sound of love in it, made her own heart pause on a beat. But, alas!—the voices only went on as before. Oh dear!—would nothing come of it, after all?

It went on for a long time, that talk. And till half-way through that time there was hope on the face of the listener, following its sounds without distinguishing a syllable. Then the irritating *bonhomme*, the equable

fluency of the masculine tones, the vexatious household dryness of the feminine ones, became maddening to ears that expected at least cordial warmth. Oh, if she could only enter unseen, and prompt the apathy of the speaker! She bit her lip with vexation, and found it difficult to resist the temptation to listen outright. Surely Yorick must have reached the crucial point by now! Or were they, after all, talking of something else all the while?...

There, *that* was emphasis, anyhow! And any evidence that the topic had been fairly broached was welcome. Only, the warmth was on the wrong side; it was Aunt Bessy's voice for one thing; and, for another, was a good deal more like indignation than affection. Now, very likely you know that, when something you cannot hear is repeated several times, it becomes audible however honourably determined you may be not to listen to it. At about the third repetition Miss Fossett, though she sincerely believed she hadn't been listening, had become aware that the phrase was, "Why can't you make her marry you herself?" and, moreover, that her own self was the one referred to. Her heart went with a bound, and her breath got caught in a gasp; and then, somehow without sense or reason, her hair had got loose and come down, and she was getting it arranged at the mirror over the chimney-piece, with the bevelled edges and the ebony frame, and trying to make out she had never begun to cry, when Yorick came back into the room, saying: "What do you think Bess says, Addie? She says if I were to ask you, you would marry me yourself." She didn't know precisely what reply she made. But she certainly had no grounds for complaining of the coldness of the Rector's reception of it.

When, five minutes later, Miss Caldecott followed her brother-in-law into the room, the lady and gentleman were still before the looking-glass, apparently very much pleased. And the latter, without taking his arm from the waist of the former, said: "I say, Bess, what a ghastly couple of fools we have been!" and broke into one of his big laughs.

"Speak for yourself, Athel!" said Aunt Bessy, rather stiffly.

"I didn't mean you. I meant Addie."

"Speak for yourself, Yorick!" said Addie; and made believe to detach herself, but did not insist. Then Aunt Bessy kissed her twice on each side, and the two children, coming into the room from the garden, off an excursion, said, "What's this law?" and seemed to think some new movement was afoot, which would probably be beneficial in the main ultimately. They accepted partial explanation, however, fuller particulars being promised in due course, and went away to have their things off.

A day or two later Aunt Bessy, being alone with the bride-elect, cleared her throat in an ominous way, as one does when one has something of importance to communicate. Miss Fossett, who in the previous twenty-four hours had twice said to the Rector, "What is the matter with Bess? I'm sure there's something brewing," became aware that she was going to be enlightened about this mystery, and waited, open-eyed. Revelation followed, conscious of importance, but sometimes at a loss for phraseology.

"I think, my dear Adeline, I may speak freely to you on a subject which nearly concerns my own happiness." Adeline pricked up her ears, and the speaker, feeling she had made a good beginning, cleared her throat again less poignantly, and continued: "When dear Athel talked that silly nonsense to me the other day . . . you know what I am referring to, dear Addie?" Yes—Addie knew. "Well . . . I did not then know with any certainty the sentiments entertained towards myself by . . ."

"By ? . . ." said Addie, and waited.

"By a gentleman who is very slightly known to you—so slightly that, though no doubt you know him by name, you will hardly . . ."

Addie, suddenly apprehensive, thought in a hurry, clapping her hands to help recollection. The moment she lighted on the name that was eluding her, she pointed straight, as at a convicted delinquent. "Mr. Brownrigg," said she firmly.

Miss Caldecott excused what no accusation had been brought against. "I know," said she, "that the name is not a showy one; but the family is old, and his scientific



attainments indisputable. He has recently been appointed to the Chair of Logic and Mental Philosophy in . . .

"But, my dear Bess, his opinions! And why didn't you tell us?"

"His opinions, my dear, are generally misunderstood. And as to why I did not tell you, how could I, when I did not know myself? I only wish that when dear Athel . . ."

"Took my advice and made a goose of himself—I know. I plead guilty. Yes. . . ."

"Well—I wish I had then been able to speak with . . . a . . . certainty of this . . . a . . . possible arrangement. But it was only when I referred to the change in Athel's plans that Mr. Brownrigg . . ."

"But you haven't seen him since I . . . since our engagement . . . Oh, Bess!—you wrote off to him at once."

"I did nothing of the sort." Dignity was manifest.

"I was writing to Mr. Brownrigg on quite another subject, and referred to it incidentally. It was only last night that I got his answer in reply, and I think it need be no secret that it contained an offer of marriage, very beautifully and clearly expressed. He pointed out that, however painful it might be to me to relinquish the charge of my sister's children, even to a step-mother who is already almost as much a mother to them as myself . . ."

Oh, Bess dear, I will molly-cosset over Phoebe and Joan. I will, indeed!"

"You'll spoil them, Addie. But that's neither here nor there. Mr. Brownrigg went on to point out that I could now consult my own welfare and his, without any detriment to the interests of the two children." At this point Miss Caldecott became quite natural, saying: "He would never have asked me, Addie, as long as he thought I was wanted here." In which few words Miss Fossett saw more of the little drama that had been going on in the last six months than in all the rest put together.

"But his opinions, my dear, his opinions!" said she. "However will you get on with his opinions? I thought he was an Atheist, and all sorts of things."

Miss Caldecott replied that whoever had said such a thing of Mr. Brownrigg had libelled him grossly. The

exact contrary was the case. No one ever approached sacred subjects in a more reverential spirit than Mr. Brownrigg. She was not qualified to repeat his elucidations of the great German Philosopher he had such an admiration for. But he had been able to point out even to her humble understanding that the question whether there was or was not a supreme Being turned entirely on the meaning of the verb to Be, which was at best a finite Human expression. Miss Caldecott scarcely did justice to all her suitor's exponency of the Identity of the Highest Atheism with the Highest Theism.

She had, however, been specially impressed with a chapter from Graubosch's "*Divagationes Indagatoris*," of which he had read her his translation. In this the following passage occurs: "The Thinker of the Future will do well to turn his attention to the construction of a language expressly adapted to deal with the Unknown and Infinite. At present our vocabulary is based entirely, so far as we understand it, on things within our comprehension, and even its meanings are not invariably a subject of unanimity. Until we possess such a language our efforts to grapple with the Essentially Incomprehensible must be futile, of necessity. It would be a step in the right direction if all schools of Thought could agree as to the nature of the Agency to which the Known and the Unknown, the Finite and the Infinite, are alike to be imputed. The selection of a name for this Agency has been the subject of a good deal of crude and unphilosophical discussion in ages less enlightened than the one the New School of Thought proposes to inaugurate. So much so that many nomenclatures have used more than one name for the same Person or Entity; one of the number being occasionally kept secret, as being Unpronounceable; although in this case difficulties must have arisen about divulging it. Pending agreement among the various branches and affiliated Societies of the New School as to the Nature and Extent of the Unknown; the original promoter of Causation; and the terms on which his Instigator, if any, had himself qualified for Existence, we should not discountenance, but rather sanction, the use of the vulgar terminology, such as Gott, Gou, Dieu, Deus, Zeus, and so on.

No doubt within the near future a Lexicon or Dictionary of words and phrases applicable to things beyond our cognisance will be put in hand, and until the publication of this Thesaurus Novus we may safely discourage heated argument on subjects with which our present resources in language do not qualify us to deal. Possibly an absolute silence, and a consciousness of our own insignificance, may be the safest attitude to assume towards the Infinite, pending the issue of the volume. And during this interim, it would appear to be the safest policy to fall in with the apparent scheme of the Visible Creation; and to comply, so far as our information goes, with the Will of its Creator."

Had Miss Caldecott been able to repeat all that Mr. Brownrigg had pointed out to her, Miss Fossett would no doubt have perceived that no danger to religion or morality could possibly accrue from reasonings that had such a happy faculty of landing in the *status quo*.

Towards the conservation of which Miss Caldecott, as she explained to her friend, had been able to contribute. "I am sure, dear Addie," she said, "that I may rely on your rejoicing with me that I have prevailed upon Mr. Brownrigg to abstain, in the publication of this translation, from the intention he had of spelling Him and He with a little H. I mean, when reverence for established usage prohibits what he speaks of as 'lower-case type.' He at once assented to my wishes, saying that in view of the issues involved, to persist in his intention would be to pursue a—what did he call it?—'a policy of pin-pricks.' That was it."

In the sequel Mrs. Brownrigg eventuated, in the place of Miss Caldecott. And she and her husband are a happy couple at this date of writing. They have discovered a *modus vivendi*, and are highly satisfied with it.

That is how it was that the conversation with which this chapter opened became possible. Let it proceed:

"Do you think Sir Alfred's last book is so much worse than his others, Yorick?"

"I can't say it struck me so. If it is, it's not because of his knock on the head; because it was all written three

years ago, and has been lying in a drawer. But the reviewers—he was talking about it himself yesterday evening—always take for granted that every book is the work of the last twelvemonth. He read me some of what he has just written, and it seemed all right to me. That Bob of his is a delightful boy, only too sweeping in his views. It is not true that all reviewers are asses, or that they never read the books they criticise. Bob came with him to see me off."

"How do they like Sussex Terrace?"

"Very much. At least, they will when they are settled. It's a splendid big house. I think he was glad to leave the Hermitage, for more reasons than one. . . ."

"I know one. What were the others?"

"Which is the one you know?"

"Mrs. Eldridge."

"Yes—she was one. But I suppose the chief one was the one. Anything to get rid of what brought the story back. He has never spoken of it again to me."

"Not since that one time?"

"Yes—long ago now! When was it?—over a twelvemonth. He described how it all came back to him." The Rector extemporised a sympathetic shudder, and made an excruciated noise; both very expressive. "You see, in his oblivion, he was simply hungering for the coming of this wife he had quarrelled with, and remembering her as in her early days. . . ."

"Oh, it was hideous! Just fancy the memory of Judith Arkroyd coming back to him!"

"Yes—as he told me himself—with the arms of his wife round him whom he had been longing for! He told me all about it—how he had said to her: 'What for, Polly Anne? What am I to forgive you for?' Because, don't you see, sweetheart? . . ."

"Oh yes—I see."

"... Don't you see, she was crying over him, and all contrition for her own share of the business. She said to him—so he told me—'It was all my fault, love. If only I had never posted that letter!' He said, 'What letter?' and she said, 'The letter with the postscript.' And then all on a sudden he remembered everything, from the be-

ginning. He could hardly bear to speak of it. . . . I've told you all this."

"Little bits come out that you haven't told. Go on!"

"He said he was afraid he should go mad, and had an idea that clinging to his wife would save him. 'I was simply,' said he, 'on fire with shame and intense terror of what I might remember next. I felt defenceless against what might be sprung on me out of the past.'"

"Did he say anything about Judith?"

"Neither of them mentioned her. That I understand. When they spoke of the motor-car, they seem by common consent to have left it a blank who was in it. He said to her: 'But the man in the road—Blind Jim—was he hurt?' And then she had to tell him of Jim's death, and the dear little thing, and he was so horror-struck that she was afraid he would slip back, and went for help. He had a very bad time—a sort of attack of delirium—and the doctor had to give him morphine."

"Did she tell him anything of Judith at the inquest—and all—and all the share she had in it, you know?"

"The inquest was next day."

"So it was. Of course! But was he ever told about her? Did you tell him?"

"Why—n-no! I rather shirked talking about it, that's the truth."

"But you did tell him that odd thing . . . you know?"

The Rector's voice dropped. "I know what you mean. The child's voice, and 'Pi-lot.' Yes, I told him."

"Was he impressed?"

"Ye-es—well!—perhaps not exactly in that way. But he thought it very curious, and wanted me to send it to the Psychical Society."

"Shall you?"

"Hm! . . ."

"Shan't you?"

"I think perhaps not. I don't feel quite like having it publicly discussed. I dislike being cross-examined. However, we might think about that." He said this with the manner of one who adjourns his subject, and then, as though to confirm the adjournment, went back on a previous question—the last one easily to hand. "No—

she's an odd character, Judith. You know I shall always say there was something magnificent about it."

"Something detestable," said his wife. A side comment, half *sotto voce*.

"Well—not lovable, I admit. But fancy the girl saying what she did in the face of all that crowded room full of people—in the face of their indignation, mind you!—for no secret was made of it."

"She ought to have been ashamed of herself. What was it she said to the coroner?"

"When he had stuttered through his remonstrance or reprimand, or whatever he meant it for! Oh, she let him finish, and then said with the most absolute tranquillity—not a ruffle!—'Possibly. But I should do the same thing, under the same circumstances, I have no doubt, another time.' The poor coroner hadn't a chance. It was just like a respectable greengrocer trying to reprove Zenobia or Cleopatra."

"I shouldn't have thought so."

"I suppose that means that I'm a man?"

"That was the idea."

"It proves what I say, then—that there should always be women on juries. However, she and Fossier had a narrow escape. They might have found themselves in a very unpleasant position."

"He wept, didn't he, and sheltered himself behind mademoiselle?"

"Well, he said, 'Qu'ai je pu faire, moi, contre mademoiselle? Que pouvez vous faire, messieurs, vous-memes?' They didn't understand him, of course, and Felixthorpe softened him down in the translating."

"Didn't the dear old Bart. try to apologize her away?"

"Yes—he tried to suggest that she saw me coming, and knew I should attend to poor Jim. But when the jury went over the ground, they saw that was utterly impossible. . . . Well!—she'll be a fizzing Duchess, as Bob Challis would say."

A pause followed, and then the Rector showed signs of sleepiness after a tiring day, asking whether it wasn't getting on for bed-time. And he had a right to be tired, because he had risen suddenly from dinner to go over to

see old Mrs. Fox, at a summons conveyed by Jarge, the bee-tender, who had made shower the old dame was doyin'. She wasn't, and is still living, we believe. But the Rector had not got back till near ten, when he was glad of his comfortable day's-end chat with his wife. The news of Judith's engagement to the Duke's heir had come that morning, and had met him on his return from a visit to London, which he had left by an early train, after spending the previous evening at Challis's, where he stayed the night.

He paused a moment over knocking the ashes from his meerschaum, and began saying something. But he didn't get as far as a consonant. Then his wife said: "What were you going to say?"

"Don't know whether I ought to tell you this!..." said he.

"You must, *now*!"

"Well—you must be very, *very* careful not to repeat it! Challis didn't bind me over, certainly; but I know he meant confidence, all the same."

"I'll be very, very careful. Go on!"

"That old woman—the religious old horror..."

"Yorick—*darling*!"

"That devout old lady, then!... What about her? Why, there's some reason to suppose, apparently, that she never was respectably married at all to the first wife's father. I am speaking of the Deceased Wife's Sister's sister—Marianne's sister..."

"What a horrid old hypocrite! And she making all that rumpus about Marianne 'living in sin'!"

"Yes—but I wasn't thinking about that... Don't you see!..."

"Don't I see what?"

"Don't you see that, if it's true, the Deceased Wife's Sister's sister wasn't born in wedlock. So—legally, at any rate—she wasn't her sister at all. Not so much as a half-sister. And she wasn't a Deceased Wife, by hypothesis. Q. E. D. So what was Kate?" Mrs. Athelstan Taylor looked perplexed—evidently thought Kate must have been hard put to it to be there at all.

"Wouldn't Dr. Barham?..." she began.

The Rector filled out the question. "What my young friend Bob calls 'make a great ass of himself'!"

"Really, Yorick, he is your Bishop! But I suppose that's the sort of thing I meant."

"My dear, he can't!"

"Why not?"

"Because his Creator has anticipated him." The Rector seemed happy over this. His wife did not feel quite certain she understood it. But she was sure it was time to light her candle, and that, broadly speaking, the curtain might fall.

"It *has* been a strange story," said she, in a sort of generally forgiving, conclusive way.

"It *has*," repeated Athelstan Taylor. "And not a pleasant one! Anyhow, it's one consolation, that it never can happen again."

FINIS



## THE AUTHOR TO HIS READERS ONLY

WHEN, to my great surprise, I published four years since a novel called "Joseph Vance," a statement was repeated more than once in some journals that were kind enough to notice it, that its author was seventy years of age. Why this made me feel like a centenarian I do not know, especially as it was five years ahead of the facts. But that was its moral effect. Its practical one was to make me endeavour to set it right. I then learned for the first time how hopeless is the pursuit of an error through the columns of the press, and soon gave up the chase.

But in the course of my attempts to procure the reduction to which I was entitled, I expressed a hope that the said author would live to be seventy, and, further, that he would write four or five volumes as long as his first in the interim. To my thinking, he has been as good (or as bad) as his word, for this present volume is Vol. II. of the fourth story published since then, and the day of its publication will be the author's seventieth birthday; or, if you consider the day of his birth as a birthday, his seventy-first. I see nothing to be ashamed of in the way this author has come to time, and can (so far) look with complacency on the fact that we are each other.

At the risk of more Early Victorianism—I have a heavy cross against me!—may I use the rest of this fly-leaf, otherwise blank, to touch on another point? I know that gossiping with one's readers is a disreputable Early Victorian practice, and far from Modern, which everything ought to be. But I will not detain mine long.

I wish to protest against a misinterpretation that readers of fiction will probably continue to make to the end of time, however strongly authors may appeal against it.

I refer to the practice of ascribing views—political, religious, or otherwise—expressed by characters in a book to its author. It is as unreasonable to do so as to impute every opinion spoken in a dream to the dreamer himself. In this foregoing book, as in others, the author has merely put on record what the characters he was dreaming of seemed to him to say.

I repudiate responsibility on his behalf. Hold a writer of pure fiction answerable for the opinions of every one of his dramatis personæ, and he will be limited in the choice of them to folk who are on all fours

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*with everyone else—conformists of a venomous type—good to be read about in bed by persons who suffer from insomnia, but good for nothing else. Take the words of each character for what they are worth, and if a character alleged by the tale to be sane says something you don't agree with, condemn it as ill-drawn, if you like, but don't call the author to account as if he had ventured to question the validity of your own persuasions. Leave him a free hand, and he will verser comme si o'était pour soi, and his books will be infinitely more readable, even if some of his favourite characters utter incorrect opinions.*

*I may add that if the readers of this novel want anything altered in it, it shall be done in the second edition, provided that they are unanimous and that it will leave the text consecutive.*

W. DE MORGAN.

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